

Is The Lord's Church Necessary for My Salvation?

What do New Testament Christians Believe?

Does one have to be a member of a church to be saved? Today, many will answer: "I don't think it makes much difference to which church a person belongs or whether one is a member of any church, just so one is sincere." Others will explain, "Yes, you have to be in the Lord's church to be saved, but it is an invisible, mystical something that no human knows anything about." Still others will argue, "The church doesn't save. It is not important for salvation. One can go to heaven just as well without being a member of the church as he can in the church." In contrast, some believe that you must be a member of the church in the New Testament if you are saved?

Keep in mind that not all denominations believe that the church is non-essential for salvation. Some actually believe you have to be a member to be saved. One Catholic book, it says, "Any church that does not recognize Peter as its foundation stone is not the Church of Christ..." (The Faith of Our Fathers by James Gibbons, p. 82). This would exclude all others who say that Peter was not a pope. Most Baptist churches demand that baptism can only be practiced via immersion in water, whereas, many Methodists hold the practice of sprinkling for baptism. Those who practice New Testament Christianity proclaim that salvation can only be found in the Lord's Church, the Church of Christ.

What We Do Not Believe...

First, we do not consider ourselves morally better than all those in denominations or even those who consider themselves Christians but are not members of a denomination. Members of the Church of Christ can and do commit some of the same sins as others in and out of the various denominations.

Furthermore, we are not making a claim of superiority over other churches. It is not a claim to be the best denomination. This would come across as extreme prejudice and with self-righteous exclusiveness. Our claim is not like a group of fans at a ball game waving giant hands chanting, "We're number one! We're number one!"

Our desire is not to exclude others from Heaven or from obtaining salvation. We want all our friends and neighbors to have salvation and enter into heaven by obedient faith.

Finally, we by no means are claiming a person has to be a member of a particular denomination in order to be saved. To many minds, the word "church" implies a denomination. One denomination is basically as good as another. We claim that the Church of the New Testament is essential to salvation. Yet at the same time, we claim that no one has to be a member of any denomination. These two statements appear to be self-contradicting and irreconcilable.

What Do We Believe...

The fact is, we believe the Lord's Church is not a denomination. It is not made up of various denominations and has nothing to do with the denominations of men. The Lord bled for and built His Church. Never did He die for or promise to build the hundreds of denominations in existence today. This is why we claim that you do not have to be a member of a denomination to be saved,

but the saved are in the Church of the Lord.

Although many believe there are many churches or denominations, we believe that there is only one Church and it is not divided up into various denominations. Did the early Christians you read about in the book of Acts belong to various churches or denominations? NO! Why? It is because no denominations existed in the first centuries. Adam Clarke, a noted Methodist commentator, wrote in his comments on Col. 4:5:

“...the church of Christ was considered an enclosure; a field, or vineyard, well hedged or walled. Those who were not members of it were considered without; i.e. not under that special protection and defense which the true followers of Christ had...As to be a Christian was essential to the salvation of the soul, so to be in the church of Christ was essential to being a Christian; therefore it was concluded that ‘there was no salvation out of the pale of the church.’”

Even a major denomination’s creed, The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches, by Edward T. Hiscox, states that there was only one church and that it was essential for salvation:

It is most likely that in that Apostolic age when there was but “one Lord, one faith and one baptism,” and no differing denominations existed, the baptism of a convert by that very act constituted him a member of the church, and at once endowed him with all the riches and privileges of full membership. In that sense, “baptism was the door into the church.” Now it is different...

How many churches are there? Today, there are over 760 differing denominations all claiming allegiance to Christ. The Bible plainly teaches there is only one Church (Eph. 1:22, 23; 4:5), because Jesus established only one Church (Matt. 16:18) and only purchase one with His Blood (Acts 20:28). Therefore, we believe that the Church is essential to salvation. If there is no Church, there can be no salvation. If you are saved you are a part of the Lord’s Church. How?

The Church is Essential to Salvation

God Adds the Saved to the Church

How is it that if one is saved he is a part of the Lord’s Church? God adds the saved to the Church.

- “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47, NKJV).
- “And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47, NASV).

The word “added” here means to “join to, to gather to any company.” Those who were saved became numbered or joined with the apostles. Notice the Church did not do the adding. The Lord is the One that added the saved. Neither did any of these 3000 who were saved on the day of Pentecost join themselves to the Church. God did the saving and God did the joining.

Furthermore, God adds people to the Church as soon as they are saved. He is perfect. Therefore, He makes no mistakes in His record-keeping. No soul is added who is not saved. He

does not fail to add anyone who is truly saved. God does not fall weeks or months behind. He does this job daily. To assume that one can be saved out of the Church is to assume that one can be saved without the Lord knowing it. To be saved and join yourself to the Church of your choice is insolent. God does the saving, and God has the right to join to the Church of His choice. You have no choice in the matter. After all, you did not send your son to die for and establish a Church (Acts 20:28).

The Saved Are in the Church

On the day of Pentecost when the Church was established, those who were being saved by the Lord did not stand around wondering, “Which church should I join?” They joined no Church. The Lord added or joined them to “the church.” If one is saved, he is joined by God to the Church, and thus, it is superfluous and nonsensical to argue about which Church he could join. The saved are in the Church. None of the saved are outside of the Church. There was only one Church to be joined to by God. It was God’s choice as to which Church He joined the saved. Therefore, all the saved have been added to the Church of Jesus Christ from the moment they are saved.

No record exists of anybody being saved outside of Church. To be a Christian, to be saved, to be a member of Christ’s Church, are all the same thing. All true believers were added to the Lord by God: “And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women” (Acts 5:14).

The Church Does Not Save

The American Standard Version says God added “...those that were saved.” Therefore, the Church does not do the saving. The Church is the saved. It is the recipient of saved, not the dispenser of salvation. The Roman Catholic Church believes that it has the right to dispense salvation to men or even withhold salvation. However, the Church is the saved, not the Savior. The Son of God is the Savior of the Church (Eph. 5:23). One does not become a member of any denomination or even the Church we read about in the New Testament to be saved. Instead, if they are saved, they are at that point added or joined by God to the Church of the New Testament.

Baptism Saves and Puts One into the Church

If God adds a person to “the Church” at moment of his salvation, at what point is one saved? God has chosen a very simple mechanism for man to gain entrance into His Church. That mechanism is baptism. On the day of Pentecost, the people interrupted Peter’s preaching to ask, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins’” (Acts 2:37,38). At the point in time they were baptized their sins were remitted. Remission of sins is the same as being saved.

There is no evidence in the New Testament where one is saved and later baptized in order to join a Church of his choice. Rather one is saved at the moment he is baptized and at that point, he is also added or baptized into the Church. “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13). No one can be saved unless he is baptized into the Church, that is, the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22,23, 4:3-5).

The Saved Are Not Added to a Denomination

Again, God never added anyone to a denomination when he was saved. Not a single denomination was in existence at the time. Any attempt to separate or divide Christians into separate

religious denominations was met with strong rebuke by the Lord's apostles (1 Cor. 1:10-13). None of the apostles ever joined a denomination, created a denomination or even added a single soul to a denomination. God adds all the saved to "the church" (Acts 2:47). There are no saved souls to be added to a denomination. If "the church" contains all the saved added by God, and a denomination does not contain all the saved, it stands to reason that no denomination is the Church of the New Testament.

Denominations Do Not Save

Even the staunchest supporters of denominations concede that one can be saved outside of a denomination or all the denominations. Since this is so, why have denominations? Division upon division- -what's it good for? In fact, not only are denominations non-essential to salvation, a person cannot be saved in a denomination.

The Church we read about in the New Testament is not a denomination; it is not the sum total of all the denominations; and it has nothing whatever to do with denominations. No denomination is required. No denomination is commanded. No denomination is permitted. Denominationalism is sinful. Jesus prayed that all His disciples be one as He and the Father have oneness (Jn. 17:20,21). Paul pleaded that there be no religious divisions among the Church, but that all believers are to be like-minded (1 Cor. 1:10-13). Denominationalism is characterized by its division, while New Testament Christianity is characterized by its unity. There is "one body" (Eph. 4:3-6) "which is the church" (Eph. 1:22,23).

In summary, God adds the saved to "the church." All the saved are in "the church." The Church does not save, but "the church" is composed of all those who have been saved. It is at the point of being baptized "for the remission of sins" that one is saved and thus added by God to "the church." The saved are not added to a denomination. No denomination is essential to salvation. However, the Church is essential to salvation, because God adds all the saved to the Church.

At this point, you may still be asking, "Where is the passage that says one must be a member of the Church of Christ to be saved?" It is found in Ephesians 5:23: "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body." Again, "the body" is the Church. To be saved outside the Church is to be saved without a Savior.

In Christ & In the Church

For more than a year, a little old cleaning woman, who lived on the wrong side of the tracks had been trying to join a fashionable downtown church. The preacher was not eager to have a seedy looking person in faded, out-of-style clothes sitting in a pew next to his rich members. When she called for the fifth time to discuss membership, he put her off for the fifth time. "I tell you what," said the preacher, "you just go home tonight and have a talk with God about it. Later you can tell me what He said." The poor woman went her way. Weeks moved into months. The preacher saw no more of her, and his conscience did hurt a little. Then one day he encountered her scrubbing floors in an office building, and felt impelled to inquire, "Did you have your little talk with God, Mrs. Washington?" he asked. "Oh, my yes," she said, "I talked with God as you suggested." "Ah, and what answer did He give you?" asked the preacher. "Well, Preacher," she said as she pushed back a wisp of stringy hair with a sudsy hand, "God said for me not to get discouraged, but to keep trying. He said that He Himself had been trying to get into your church for 20 years, with no more

success than I have had."

_ Unknown via PULPIT HELPS, Sept., 1990

How to obtain membership in a particular church varies from denomination to denomination. However, to be a part of the Lord's Church has never changed in two thousand years. God adds the saved to the Church at the same moment they are saved (Acts 2:47). God is not a respecter of persons. It does not matter if you are rich or poor, educated or ignorant, young or old, etc. God will add you to the church when you are saved.

If In Christ, Then In The Church

At the point one is baptized for the remission of sins he is saved, and God adds the saved to the Church (Acts 2:47). Likewise, when one is baptized he is in Christ and puts on Christ (Gal. 3:27). Paul said the Christians in Thessalonica were in Christ and God and constituted the Church (I Thess. 1:1). Who could deny that salvation is in Christ (2 Tim. 2:10)? Therefore, those enjoying the salvation in Christ are those in the Church of Christ. It is unfeasible to detach salvation from the Church since salvation is in Christ. To be in Christ means to be in the church, then salvation must be in the Church.

Conversely, to be out of the Church means to be out of Christ. Can one be saved outside of the Church? Only if he can be saved apart from Christ, for "He is the Savior of the body" (Eph. 5:23). How is it possible to be saved without a Savior? Can anyone save themselves?

All Spiritual Blessings Are in Christ

Where are all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3)? Where are all promises (2 Cor. 1:20)? Where is the blood, the forgiveness of sins found (Eph. 1:6-7)? Where must one be to have an inheritance (Eph. 1:11)? Where are those saved by grace created (Eph. 2:8-11)? Where is sanctification (1 Cor. 1:2)? Where is redemption (Col. 1:14)? Where is there no condemnation (Rom. 8:1)? Where do we become new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17)? Where is the "prize of the high calling" (Phil. 3:14)? Where do men die blessed (Rev. 14:13)? If you said "in Christ," then you are correct. All these things are found in Christ. Apart from Christ, not one of these blessings can be found. The New Testament is a vast catalog of the various spiritual blessings that can be found in Christ (2 Tim. 2:10).

You should take careful note of Ephesians 1:3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." The term "heavenly places" is found five times in Ephesians and refers to the Church, the glorious bride of Christ. Therefore, all spiritual blessings are found in Christ and in His bride or Church. Can you name one spiritual blessing that is not in Christ? Can you name one spiritual blessing that cannot be found in the Church? To be in Christ is to be in the Church and to have all these spiritual blessings. Who could now argue that the Church is not important and non-essential to our salvation? Can we be saved without the spiritual blessings found in Christ and His Church?

The Church Is the Fullness of Christ

Which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the

fullness of Him who fills all in all (Eph. 1:20-23).

If the Church is the fullness of Christ and salvation is in Christ, how could one be saved out of the Church? How is it the Church is non-essential or unimportant? The church is filled with the fullness of God by Christ (Eph. 3:19). It is to grow up into the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13,16). Christ is the Head, but a head must have a body. Christ is the bridegroom, but a Bridegroom must have a bride. Just as a body completes or fulfills the Head and a bride completes or fulfills the Bridegroom, the Church is the fullness of Christ. The Church is necessary for the completion of Christ and the plan of salvation.

Redemption, Justification, Reconciliation & Sanctification

The familiar Biblical terms redemption, justification, reconciliation and sanctification are found throughout the epistles of the New Testament. They have several things in common: 1) they express different aspects of our salvation; 2) they can only be found in Christ; and 3) they are found in His church.

Redemption

The idea behind redemption is “to buy back” or to recover something. To redeem a coupon for its redemption value you must go to the store and use it toward the purchase of the specified item. If it is 50 cents off a particular box of cereal, then you will have redeemed the coupon at the time of purchase.

Man has sinned. The cost of sin is death or his blood. To redeem us from under the penalty of death, blood had to be shed in our place. God does not remit sins without the shedding of blood (Heb. 9:22). “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins” (Heb. 10:4). So we did not have to pay the price of our redemption ourselves, God sent His Son to die for us. “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7; cf. Matt. 26:28). We are redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

Not only did God redeem our souls from sin through the blood of Christ, but Christ purchased the Church with His blood. “...the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). The blood of Christ is in the Church, and to claim to be saved out of the Church is to claim to be saved without the Blood of Christ.

Paul said to the members of the Church at Corinth, “Ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:19,20). So when Christ bought you, He bought the church. Collectively, He purchased the Church - His People. For example, I have a library of books which I collected one book at a time. Yet, I still purchased the library.

Christ purchased the Church with His own Blood (Acts 20:28). Why did Jesus shed His Blood for it, if man can be saved without it? The precious blood of Christ is meaningless if one can be saved outside the Lord’s Church because of his own goodness. Just think how preposterous it makes God to seem when a man says he can be saved outside of the Church? God has paid the life of His Son for that which is non-essential and unnecessary. It is equal to attributing God with being an unmerciful monster who used Christ’s Blood to purchase a useless and unnecessary institution.

Justification

The word justify means to deem to be right, and justification is the state of being acquitted of one's sins. This is not a declaration of innocence, but having done the right things or met the right conditions to be declared right or just before God.

A sinner must be justified to be saved (Rom. 3:23-24). Those whom God has called are justified (Rom. 8:30). The called are in the body (Col. 3:15). The Body is the Church (Col. 1:18). Therefore, the justified are in the Church.

Justification is made possible by the Blood of Christ. "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him" (Rom. 5:9). The Church is purchased by the Blood of Christ. Thus, those in the church are those who are justified.

Reconciliation

When one is reconciled, he is made friends again with the one he has become estranged from. Spiritually, we have become enemies of God by way of our love of this world and fellowship with darkness (Js. 4:4). Reconciliation means we have been placed back into a state of acceptability with God. We have been made friends again with our Creator.

The one who made the reunion possible is God's Son, Jesus Christ. Reconciliation is in or by Christ. "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18,19). Three things are clearly stated: 1) God is reconciling us unto Himself by Christ; 2) He does not impute the trespasses unto those who are reconciled; and 3) this is done by the word of reconciliation.

Where are those who are reconciled? They are in Christ. But are they in the Church or out? Reconciliation is in the Body of Church: "and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity" (Eph. 2:16). It is admitted that man must be reconciled to God to be saved. Reconciliation unto God is in the Body or Church. Therefore, man must be in the Church to be saved. Paul is not saying that we're reconciled to God by the Church, but in the Church. Outside the Body there is no reconciliation. Reconciliation is in the Body. So, can one be reconciled and not be in the Church? Can one be saved without reconciliation? A person might as well argue that one can be saved or reconciled apart from Christ or be reconciled outside of Christ. God has no friends apart from those in Christ and in the Church.

Sanctification

To be sanctified means to be holy, cleansed, released from sin, and set apart from sin into the service of God. We have been sanctified by the Blood of Christ: "By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10). Christ has sanctified the Bride (His Church), "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27).

How did Christ cleanse or wash the Church? Paul had his sins washed away when he obeyed the instruction of baptism (Acts 22:16). The way one becomes a member of the Church is exactly the same way one is sanctified, born again, reconciled to God, and enters into Christ through having his sins washed away in baptism. Those sanctified are in the Church (1 Cor. 1:2). If you are in the

Church it means you are being sanctified. Can one be saved outside the Church? Can people be saved without sanctification?

Akin to the term sanctified is the word saint. When a sinner is sanctified he becomes a saint. The church is made up of saints, not alien sinners. Consider the significance of the following chart:

Saints	Church
“The saints...at Ephesus” Eph. 1:1	“The church of Ephesus” Rev. 2:1
“The saints...at Philippi” Phil. 1:1	“no church...but ye only” Phil. 4:15
“Thy saints at Jerusalem” Ac. 9:13	“The church...at Jerusalem” Ac. 8:1
“Churches of the Saints” 1 Cor. 14:33	“Churches of Christ” Rom. 16:16

The saints, the individually sanctified ones, comprise the Church of Christ in the specified location.

Christ sanctified, or set apart, the Church. But just what did He sanctify? A denomination? No; He sanctified the Church we read about in the New Testament, the one He bled and died for and the one He built.

The Redeemed are in Christ and in the Church. Those justified through Christ are in the church. Those who have been reconciled through Christ are in the Church. The saints who have been sanctified “with the washing of water by the word” make up the Church. Redemption, justification, reconciliation, and sanctification are all terms used to describe the various aspects of our salvation. They are all necessary for salvation and the Church. Therefore, to say that salvation is only in the Church is no more than to say that salvation is only in Christ.

– by Daniel R. Vess