

I Do Not Need to "Go to Church"

"I don't need to go to church in order to go to Heaven."
"I have church in my heart."
"Church is just a place you go to give all your money to the preacher."
"Church is just for people who need to be reminded to do right."
"Church is just for the weak-minded."
"Church is just a place full of hypocrites."
"Going to church just isn't important or necessary."
"God and I have it worked out without me going to church."
"The church is just a state of mind."
"I should not have to go to church all the time--just when I feel like it."

These are some of the comments I have heard from others about the church. Unfortunately, there is a huge misconception about what the church is and what its purpose and function is. Let's study God's Word (the Holy Bible) and see what God teaches about the church.

The church is not a building.

The church is not the building I go to on an occasional Sunday and sing a few songs, hear a few prayers and a sermon and throw some money into a collection plate. God's Word (the Holy Bible) defines the church as "the called out ones," "the elect," "body of Christians," "body of Christ."

In Colossians 1:18 Paul is writing to the church in Colosse about the superiority of Christ and he says, "And He [Christ] is the head of the body, the church." In Ephesians 1:22-23, Paul also wrote, "And He [God] put all things under His [Christ's] feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body." Therefore, the church is the body of Christ or Christians, not the building. So when I say, "I don't need to 'go to church'," what I am really saying is, "I don't need to be a Christian and I don't need to be a member of Christ's body in order to go to Heaven."

The church is the body of Christians.

A Christian is a follower and believer of Christ *and* a member of Christ's body.

In Acts 2 Luke is writing about the establishment of the church. In verse 47 he said, "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." How can I say I can be saved without being added to the church when the Bible teaches that the Lord adds to the church those who are being saved? Being a Christian and being a member of Christ's body (the church) are not two distinct things. When I become a Christian, God adds me to the church. I cannot be a Christian without being a member of Christ's body (the church) and I cannot be a member of Christ's body without being a Christian. The two are synonymous.

The body of Christ (the church) is those who are in Christ.

If I am not in the church, I am not in Christ. In Ephesians 5:23, Paul said, "Christ is the head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body [church]." Again, how can I say I can be saved without being a member of Christ's body when the Bible clearly states Christ is the Savior of the body?

I must be in Christ, and therefore, a member of His body.

I cannot go to Heaven without being in Christ and a member of His body. I Corinthians 15:24 says, "Then comes the end, when He [Christ] delivers the kingdom [the church] to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power."

In John 14:6, Christ says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Further, in John 10:9 Christ says, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved..." So, in order to be saved I have to go through Christ. How can I go through Christ without being a member of His body? Read Galatians 3:27-29.

I cannot fulfill all of God's commandments without being a member of the church.

Some may say that they can be a member of Christ's church without having to be at worship services all the time.

In Acts 20:7, the early New Testament church met on the first day of the week to partake of the Lord's Supper as commanded by Christ, "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread." Each week has a first day of the week. How can I break bread without being in worship services every first day of the week?

In Ephesians 5:19 Paul instructed the church in Ephesus by saying, "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." He also told the church in Colosse in Colossians 3:16 saying, "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." How can I speak to my fellow Christians in song if I am not meeting with them?

The writer of Hebrews in Hebrews 10:25 also instructs the church by saying, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another and so much more as you see the Day approaching." How can I obey this commandment when I do forsake the assembling of Christians together? How can I exhort or uplift others or be uplifted myself if I don't go attend worship services?

I don't care how strong a person I may think I am; I cannot remain a strong faithful Christian by myself. I need to be around other Christians. I need to pray with other Christians. I need to sing with other Christians. I need to listen and study the Bible with other Christians. That is God's plan. That is one reason why He established the church. He knows we need each other for guidance, support, and strength.

Acts 2:42 records the early New Testament church as continuing "steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread and prayers." How can I be like the Christians in the New Testament without attending worship services?

In I Corinthians 16:2 Paul told the church in Corinth to, "On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper." Also in II Corinthians 9:7, he also said, "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver." These collections were not taken up so Paul could become a rich man. The collections taken up each week are to support the church and its functions. The church's functions are to worship God and spread the Word of God throughout the world. In order to support missionaries and the preacher, the body of Christ (the church) must pool their money together. To avoid having worship services outside in the cold or heat, we have buildings. How are they to be paid for and maintained without the church giving of their money? Finally, how can I give upon the first day of the week when I don't attend worship services?

If I am not a member of Christ's body (the church) then the New Testament does not apply to me.

The church of Christ was established in Jerusalem in A.D. 30 as recorded in Acts 2. The rest of the New Testament is letters written to early churches of Christ. Luke said in Acts 6:7, "And the Word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly." These letters were written to these churches admonishing them, exhorting them, reproving them, and instructing them.

Romans was written to the church in Rome.

I and II Corinthians was written to the church in Corinth.

Galatians was written to the churches in Galatia.

Ephesians was written to the church in Ephesus.

Philippians was written to the church in Philippi.

Colossians was written to the church in Colosse.

I and II Thessalonians were written to the church in Thessalonica.

I and II Timothy were written to Timothy who was at the church in Ephesus.

Titus was written to Titus at the church in Crete.

Philemon was written to the church in Colosse.

I and II Peter were written to the churches in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

I, II, and III John were written to the churches in Asia.

Revelation was written to the seven churches in Asia.

If I don't think it's necessary to be a member of Christ's church, then the New Testament doesn't really apply to me because most of it was written to members of Christ's body, the church.

Let's assume for a minute that the church is not important:

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said to Peter, "...I will build my church..." If the church is not important, then why did Christ build it?

In Acts 20:28 Luke warned the elders of the church to oversee the flock (the church), which Christ purchased with His own blood. If the church is not important, then why did Christ die for it?

In Ephesians 5:22-33 Paul compared the relationship between a husband and wife to Christ and the church. In verse 23 he said, "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body." In verse 25 Paul said, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it." In verse 27 Paul said, "That he [Christ] might present it [the church] to himself..." In verse 30 Paul said, "For we are members of his body..."

These verses tell me the following: (1) Christ is the head of the church, not any man; (2) Those in the body (the church) are saved by Christ; (3) Christ loves the church so much that He died for it; (4) Christ is going to present the church to God; and (5) Christians are members of His body (the church).

When I say that being a member of Christ's church is unimportant and unnecessary, I am saying the following: (1) I don't care if Christ is the head of the church; (2) I don't believe that I must be a member of Christ's body to be saved; (3) I don't care if Christ died for the church; (4) I can be presented to God by Christ without being a member of His body (the church); and (5) I can be a Christian and not be a member of Christ's body (the church).