

Is Church Membership Essential To Salvation?

Bible Answers About The Church

Common expressions heard today are: "One does not have to be a member of the church to be saved; the church doesn't save anyone; one can be a Christian and not be a member of any church." We must examine the Scriptures to see if these expressions are true. Therefore, the question to be answered is: "Is church membership essential to salvation?"

The Bible clearly teaches that the Lord saves: "And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins" (Matt 1:21 NAS). However, the question is, "Where does the Lord save—in the church or out of it?"

God has always placed certain restrictions or requirements that exclude from salvation all who will not comply with them. To illustrate: In the days of Noah, God offered salvation from the destruction of the flood, but the offer was only to those who entered into the ark prior to the flood. Concerning that salvation, Peter wrote: "Wherein few, that is eight souls were saved by water" (1 Pet. 3:20). This salvation was in the ark. All who stayed out of the ark were drowned. The question follows, "Where has God placed salvation from sin today?" Salvation has been placed in Christ. Paul stated: "For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus {and} with {it} eternal glory" (2 Tim 2:10 NAS; Cf. Acts 4:12). Salvation is in Christ and in no other. Jesus plainly said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (Jno. 14:6).

All spiritual blessings are "in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). Redemption is "in Christ" (Rom. 3:24). Forgiveness is "in Christ" (Col. 1:14; Eph. 1:7). Since all spiritual blessings, redemption, and the forgiveness of sins are all "in Christ" then one must be "in Christ" to have those blessings and benefits. Furthermore, Paul said, that one is a new creature "in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17). One cannot be a new creature outside of Christ. Spiritual life is in Christ: "And the witness is this that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life" (1 Jn 5:11-12 NAS). A person cannot enjoy spiritual life and at the same time be outside that realm where it is found. When man's sins are forgiven, he is "reconciled," reunited, with God (2 Cor. 5:18-20). Paul pointed out that both Jew and Gentile are reconciled in the one body: "and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity" (Eph 2:16 NAS). Therefore, one must be in that "one body" to be reconciled, forgiven, or have redemption, and to be in the "one body" is to be "in Christ."

The Bible explains that the "one body" is "the church:" "And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all" (Eph 1:22-23 NAS). "He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the

first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything" (Col 1:18 NAS). Please note, (1) People are reconciled in one body (Eph. 2:16); (2) the body is the church (Col. 1:18); therefore people are saved, or reconciled, only in the church, the one body.

Paul also declares that Christ is the Savior of the body, the church: "For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself {being} the Savior of the body" (Eph 5:23 NAS). One must be a member of that of which Christ is the Savior in order to be saved. Since the church is the body of Christ, and Christ is the Savior of the body, then one cannot be saved and not be a member of the church.

The church of our Lord is not the savior; it is the saved. All who are saved from past sins are in the church; or, the saved make up the church. The Bible says, "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47 KJV). Please note the following: (1) To be saved is to be in Christ, for salvation is in Christ; (2) to be saved equals being in the church, for the Lord adds the saved to the church; therefore, (3) to be in Christ is to be in His church.

The conclusion from these passages of Scripture is evident: one cannot be "in Christ" and outside of His church, for the church is the body of Christ. It is necessary for one to get into Christ to be saved, and that means it is necessary to be in the church. There are no saved people outside of the church of the New Testament, because the Lord adds all the saved to it. Hence, no one can be saved and become a Christian, a child of God, and not become a member of the church, the body of saved people, because the process by which one is saved and becomes a Christian is the way by which one is added to the church. If one can be saved out of the church, he can be saved out of that which the church is, the body of Christ, the family of God.

When people understand the Bible definition of the church, then they will see the necessity of being a member of it. The church of Christ is the saved, all the saved, and none but the saved. It is the entire body of the redeemed, and Christ is its head. Various local congregations are "churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16). Christ's church, or the church of Christ is the church that Christ built (Matt. 16:18).

Therefore, the answer to the question asked, "Is church membership essential to salvation?" has been clearly answered by the Scriptures: to be saved outside of the church which Christ built, which is His body, one would have to be saved out of Christ, and that is impossible because that is where God has placed salvation.

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