

The New Testament Church #2

How Important is the Church to Us ?

Introduction; What is really important?

A. If we ask many people this we will get many different answers?

1. These would probably be given by many people to answer what is personally important.
 - a. **Wealth**; a good job or inheritance or winning the lottery...
 - b. **Prestige**; Being loved or respected or feared; being from a good family or traced back to the Mayflower...
 - c. **Power**; Political power, business importance or social dominance; being a bully...
 - d. **Wisdom**; Philosophy, scientific...
 - e. **Fame**; Movie star, musician, writer, etc.
2. All of there are selfish. Some would give less selfish answers.
 - a. **Family**; Being part of a loving family...
 - b. **Doing Good**; Some feel that doing good deeds to make the world a better place is important... helping neighbors...
 - c. **Social Activists**; Standing up for the rights of the poor, the elderly, children, animals, trees, the earth and so forth...
3. A few would give religious answers.
 - a. **Believe in God**; Recognize that there is a God (or gods) and think good thoughts occasionally
 - b. **Believe in Jesus Christ as your Personal Savior**; This is enough to do; think about Him occasionally and if in trouble pray to Him...
 - c. **The church**; Attend to the church of your choice occasionally or go to church with your family on special holidays...
 - d. **Bible**; Keep a Bible in your home; keep the family tree in it; maybe even read it some...
 - e. **Letting our light shine**; Be Christlike; be a good example to others; try to tell others about God and not the church; Just be a good person

B. While some of these have their place they all miss the mark —some a lot and some a little.

1. Certainly the first two lists have some good in them. However they are not the things that are really important.
2. The third list of religious answers are also lacking. They do not get to the point of what is really important.
3. Men's ideas of what is important is often based on personal tastes, backgrounds and preferences. We decide for ourselves what we want to be important.

C. Very few really make the church important in their lives.

1. Recent surveys show that around half of Americans attend a church, synagogue or other religious assembly regularly. This is at least once a week for most weeks of the year.
2. When we consider the ones who attend more than once a week and are active in the church the numbers drop greatly.
3. **Barna Research** recently did a survey of Protestant Religious leaders. It found that only 51% had what they called a "**religious world view.**" A previous survey showed that only about 7% of all Protestants had this world view.
4. They had 6 things that people had to agree to. We would fully agree with 5 of them. We would agree with 'salvation by grace alone' but probably not in the way they intended.

- a) the accuracy of biblical teaching,
 - b) the sinless nature of Jesus,
 - c) the literal existence of Satan,
 - d) the omnipotence and omniscience of God,
 - e) salvation by *grace alone*,
 - f) the personal responsibility to evangelize.
5. We are saved by God's grace. However if they mean, '**faith only**', then we would disagree. However we are saved by God's grace alone in the sense than we did not do anything to deserve God sending His Son to die for us —Rom 5:6-8.
 6. We must react to God's grace and believe in Jesus Christ and do what He says to be saved. However salvation is still by God's grace and not by man's works.
 7. Few in the world today understand how important the Lord's church really is. They want to be saved by God knowing what is in their hearts. They want to decide what God wants of them.

D. Today we will consider the important of the New Testament church.

I. What do men think of the church?

A. Many folks shop for a church like they shop for earthly things.

1. They go to several and **compare them**. They compare their size, how comfortable their meetinghouse is, how good their singing is, how good their preacher is and if they have activities they want.
2. Some even have a **shopping list**. We get calls asking if our church has this program or that activity or if we do certain things.
3. When I say we just meet to worship God and study His word and encourage one another most will say something like, "*That's nice but that isn't what I'm looking for.*"

B. Many want a 'church' that serves them.

1. They want good singing that soothes them. They want positive preaching that makes them feel good. However they want it kept short.
2. They also want to be told they are saved. Yet they do not want to have to do a lot to be saved. They want to be told that as long as Jesus is in their hearts they are saved, regardless of what they do.
3. *2 Tim 4:2-4 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.*
4. They do not want to hear about sin, unless it is the sin of others. They do not want to be condemned and told they need to change.
5. They do not want to be told to sacrifice and deny the world and change their lives and be holy and righteous.
6. They do not want to be told the way to heaven is hard and takes great effort. They do not want to be told that **most of them won't make it**.
7. *Matt 7:13-14 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."*

C. Folks have preconceived ideas about what the church is and what God expects.

1. Most do not think it is really important. They think a person can be a good Christian without being a part of a local church.
2. They view church attendance as an option. A Christian can go or not go as he pleases. Many consider it more of a burden than a blessing.
3. Most think one can go to heaven without regular attendance. The church is not important. It is for the **weak, the superstitious** and the **fanatics**.

4. Many do not see anything unique about the N.T. church. They think all churches are right. Some even think all religions are right —**deism**. All churches and religions teach some truth and do some good. It isn't important what is in some religious book. It's what is in the heart.
5. They disregard the church, Scripture and good works as being unworthy of their time & effort.
6. *Matt 13:13 "Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand."*
7. Many consider **sincerity** to be the most important things in religion. They do not mean sincerity towards God or His word. They mean sincerity of heart in whatever they feel like doing.
8. They feel in their heart they are right with God. How do we disprove this with no standard or authority? My sincere feelings cannot override their sincere feelings. This makes man his own standard. It is the **'anything goes'** philosophy. No matter what I believe, if I am sincere, it is right.
9. *John 8:31-32 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."*

D. We need to understand what God says the church really is.

II. Did Jesus really build His church?

A. If the church is from man it is not important.

1. Men build many things. They build homes and cities and monuments and palaces and even temples. Men put great trust in their ability to build things. Yet what men build fails.
2. In **Genesis 11:1-9** men attempted to build a tower to the heavens. This was called the **'Tower of Babel'** because Jehovah stopped their labor by confusing their languages. They could not finish because God was not with them.
3. *Psa 127:1 Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain.*

B. If the church is from God then it is very important.

1. The church is not the building. It is not built by men. It may meet in a building. However the church is a spiritual relationship we have with God. The church is the people who assemble to worship their God and Lord.
2. Jesus promised to build His church. He did not promise to build a building but a relationship. He promised a way to be a child of God and have the hope of being with God in eternity.
3. *Matt 16:13-16 When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" 14 So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*
4. We see that Jesus was controversial in His day. Men had many different opinions about Him and who He was. Even those who followed Him had different ideas as to whom He really was.
5. Peter shows great faith and wisdom here in declaring Jesus to be the promised Messiah and the Son of the living God. Peter has drawn this conclusion from his time with Jesus and seeing His miracles and hearing His teaching.
6. *Matt 16:17-19 Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. 19 And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*
7. **Vs 17-19**; Jesus praises Peter for his conclusion. Peter knows the word of God —the O.T. He knows what God promised. And he knows Jesus' life. He understands from God that Jesus is the one they have been looking for.

8. Jesus promises to build His church on this rock. This is not some rock they are standing on. It is not on Peter himself, as the Catholics teach, but the statement made by Peter as to whom Jesus really is.
9. Jesus will build His church because He is the Messiah, the Christ, the Promised One, the Son of the living God. He has come to do this and He will do this. He will not fail.
10. Death (Hades) will not stop Him from doing this. Jesus gives Peter and the apostles authority in the church. They will bind and loose what is bound and loosed in heaven.
11. *Matt 19:28 So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."*
12. They will loose men from the bondage of the law of Moses and sin. They will bind the law of Jesus Christ and His blessings on all the world as they go into all the world preaching the Gospel.
13. *Matt 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.*

C. Jesus did accomplish His task.

1. Luke shows us in Acts 2 that Jesus did this. Acts 2 is the birthday of the church of Christ. Luke showed Jesus' birth in Luke 2:1-7. He shows the church's birth in Acts 2.
2. **Acts 2:1-4**; The church has a glorious beginning. Jesus had promised the apostles the Holy Spirit —John 15:26, 16:13, Act 1:8. The church did not begin by the power and wisdom of men but of God. This alone makes it important.
3. **Vs 5-8**; Men are astonished by the power of God on the apostles. Peter preaches the first Gospel sermon and opens the doors of the church. Three thousand are baptized because they believe and repent —vs 36-38. They enter the church and become children of God.
4. People are baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. They are in Christ and in His body, the church —Eph 1:22, 23. They are reconciled to God in Christ and in the church. This makes it very important.
5. *Rom 6:3-5 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,*

D. We need to understand what makes the church so important.

III. What is so great about the church?"

A. The church was planned by God Himself.

1. Scripture shows that God planned the church before He made the worlds. The church is not a 'substitute kingdom' as some say —Pre-Millennialists. It is the promised kingdom of God.
2. God did not decide to use a worldly kingdom like the Jews or the Roman empire or the United States to display His wisdom. He used the church.
3. *Eph 3:8-11 To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; 10 to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, 11 according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord,*
4. Notice that the church is part of the eternal purpose that God accomplished in Jesus Christ. This eternal purpose was planned at the beginning of the ages. It was preached among all, even the Gentiles.

5. *Rom 15:21 ...but as it is written: "To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand."* —from Isaiah 52:15, the Song of the Messiah.

B. The church is rooted in ancient Israel.

1. The prophets of Israel, beginning with Moses, prophesied of the Messiah to come. God lead Abraham out of Ur to become the father of a great nation and to bless all people —Gen 12.
2. *Gal 4:4-5 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.*
3. We are adopted into the family of God. We become spiritual descendents of Abraham and Israel. We have a lineage.
4. *Heb 2:16 For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham.*
5. *James 2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?*
6. Most of us can't trace our physical lineage back more than a few generations. Most are lucky to know their great-grandparents. Yet we can trace our spiritual lineage back thousands of years.
7. When we study the O.T. we are studying our spiritual background. We are the **'Israel of God'** today — Gal 6:11.
8. We have a family history in the Bible that is far greater than any earthly history. We have this in the church. **This makes it very important.**

C. Jesus fulfilled God's plan to create the church.

1. We have seen two sources for the establishment church they are;
 - a) **The mind of God;** spiritual background
 - b) **And ancient Israel;** physical background
2. There is a **third** source. This is **Jesus and the apostles.** Jesus came to earth through the lineage of Abraham. He died on the cross for our sins so we can be forgiven. He fulfilled the plan of God to establish the church and save men.
3. Jesus then sent the apostles into all the world to preach the Gospel and save men. When men hear the Gospel and obey it they are added to the church. Jesus and the apostles are the foundation of the church —Eph 2:20.
4. *Mark 16:15-16 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."*
5. *Acts 2:46-47 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*
6. The death of Jesus Christ for the church makes it so very important. The church is His kingdom. Many say this isn't so. They say Jesus will come a second time to establish His kingdom. However the church of Christ is also the kingdom of Christ. This makes it important.
7. *Eph 5:5 For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.*
8. *Rom 16:16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.*

D. Since the church is so important we need to be an active part of it.

Conclusion; What is really important to us?

A. Men think many things are important.

1. Men have their list of things that are important. However it is God, in His divine word, that tells us what is really important.
2. *Matt 6:33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."*

3. *Luke 10:41-42 And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. 42 But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."*
4. Mary wanted to listen to the gospel of the kingdom that Jesus taught —Matt 4:23. She left earthly responsibilities to do that. Jesus commended her for this.

B. If you see the importance of the church, then why not become a part of it?

1. As we have seen, you do this by believing, repenting and being baptized. Your sins are washed away and you enter Christ and His body, which is the church and the kingdom.
2. *Acts 2:38 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; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*
3. *Acts 22:16 'And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'*

C. Why not obey the Lord today? The church can help you to become a Christian. It can also pray for Christians who need prayers. Let us help you today.

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