



## Church

People often ask, "Why is church important? Why do I need to go to a church once I'm saved?"

The Bible encourages believers—new and old alike—to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). The first step in this process is to become actively involved in the ministry of a local church.

All Christians are members of the body of Christ. In fact, church is not just a building but a group of people who have decided to follow Christ as their Savior. It is God's will that Christians meet together as a spiritual body on the local level, which they have been doing for nearly 2,000 years. A number of New Testament letters were written to local groups of believers in different parts of the Roman Empire.

There are four main reasons we need church.

**First**, we need to identify ourselves with God's people, to be counted as Christ's followers, to come together and remain strong in the faith. Interaction with other believers builds friendship and gives spiritual stability. The writer of Hebrews 10:25 admonished the first-century followers of Christ: "Let us not neglect our church meetings, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of His coming back again is drawing near" (TLB). We cannot overemphasize the importance of fellowship in the church. There is something about fellowship within the body of believers in the local church that is unique and cannot be found elsewhere. If one live coal falls from the fire, it soon grows cold. The same principle holds true in the spiritual sense. To neglect fellowship in church is to give up the encouragement and help of other Christians. We gather together to share our faith and strengthen one another in the Lord.

**Second**, church brings people together for worship. There is nothing to compare with the work of the Holy Spirit in a Christian's heart and mind during the singing of hymns and songs of praise, public Scripture readings, prayer and the teaching of God's Word.

**Third**, regular and accurate teaching of the Bible helps us grow and live successfully as Christians. Teaching that is in step with biblical truths convicts us to do what's right and helps us lovingly hold our fellow Christians accountable.

**Fourth**, church is ideal for serving Christ and others. The evangelist Billy Graham once wrote, "I would choose a church which opens its arms to everyone with a spiritual need, regardless of social standing or race, one which has concerns about the social sins of the community, which has a missionary vision and spirit which cooperates with any worthwhile effort to bring Christ to the world. I would also choose a

church which is worthy of one's (financial gifts), and where I could unstintingly give of my talents and capabilities for the glory of God." As we seek a church like this, we will have the opportunity to minister to others. Our lives will bear witness to Christ's love (Matthew 5:16).

## Other Things to Look for in a Church

Churches differ by congregation and community, but the main goal is to find one that focuses on teaching the Bible. Key teachings include: the Bible as the true, authoritative Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16); there is one God who exists in three persons – God the Father, God the Son (Jesus) and God the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; Matthew 28:18-19); salvation by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9); and spiritual maturity that develops as Christians dedicate themselves to prayer, studying the Bible and obeying God (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Colossians 2:6-7).

No church is perfect. Every church is made up of sinners who struggle with the same things you do, so fellowship might require patience, forgiveness and love. Realize that you, too, are in need of these things.

It's also wise to not get involved with groups that call themselves Christians but deviate from the message of the Bible or don't practice what they preach. We should, however, still love and care for people who identify with these groups and use opportunities to share our faith with them.

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