

Is “Church” Necessary?

There is an ever-increasing number of people who claim to be “Christians” that don’t think “church” is necessary. That is, they believe they have a connection to God, and by it eternal salvation, but are not part of any “church,” and in many cases eschew any such affiliation or association (for a variety of reasons). Before addressing this issue specifically, there are a couple of principles we need to be sure we understand...

1. Any and every “Christian” is connected to and saved by God **directly**. The “*power of God for salvation*” is “***the gospel***” not the church. While a congregation can and should be invested in the proclamation and propagation of the gospel *locally* (Eph.4:11-16), and when possible in *other places* (Phil.4:15-18), the “*power*” to “*save*” has, nonetheless, been endowed by God Himself in “***the gospel***” rather than “the church.”
2. The “church” is the collective **product** of individual salvation, not the **provider** of it. Such is made abundantly clear in Acts 2 where individuals “*who had received his word* (Peter’s proclamation of *the gospel*, PCS) *were baptized...*” v.41. As a result of these individuals being saved through obedience to the gospel, they were “*added*” by God to the *collectivity of the saved* (otherwise known as the “universal church”). So then the church (both *universal* and *local*, cp.vv41,47) was/is the **product** of individuals being saved by obedience to the gospel rather than being the **provider** of it.

Why is this important? **People were and are saved without the church**. The book of Acts is replete with examples of conversions that occurred when one *individual* taught *another* “*the gospel*” and they obeyed it, cf. Acts 8:26-39 et al). So “the church” did not and does not “save” anyone. Obedience to “*the gospel*” does that. It is true that “a church,” meaning a “local congregation” may be instrumental in the proclamation of “*the gospel*,” but is not necessarily required for one to *hear* and *obey* “*the gospel*” and thus become saved. However...

It is also true that Christ is “*head over all to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all,*” Eph.1:22b-23. If “the church”- in both the *universal* and *local/congregational* senses, is “*the body*” of Christ, why would anyone say that it is “**unnecessary**”? The figure utilized isn’t a *headless body* anymore than it is a *bodiless head* for neither would viable! Each is **necessary** for the other’s *fulfillment*.

Please consider also some specific items addressed to one *local body* of Christ at Corinth relative to our title question:

- The notion that Christians would “*come together as a church*” was expected by God, 1Cor.11:18; and other aspects of “*church*” *activities* and *worship* were predicated upon such;
- The Lord’s Supper is to be taken as a *collective communion* Christ, 1Cor.11:20-32, and Christians were instructed to “*wait for one another*” v.33 so that it might be observed by the congregation *together*;
- The church “*assemble(d)*” (came together) for specified periods of *worship* and *edification* (literally, *building up* one another), 1Cor.14:26;

- When they *came together* “on the first day of every week” a “collection” was to be made to meet financial needs, 1Cor.16:1-2;
- *Mutual concern and care* was to exist “in the body” so that there would be “no division” and so that “when one member suffers, all the members suffer with it” and if “one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it,” 1Cor.12:25-27; and,
- There were various *appointed offices* in the church to provide for the spiritual needs and benefit of the members, 1Cor.12:28.

Now given these instructions relative to the proper function of a local church, you tell me: **Does God expect one who has been saved by obedience to the gospel to be an active member of Christ’s body in a local congregation?** Of course He does! Go back and read 1Cor.12:12-27 and answer one final question: Is any *one part* meant to survive and function **apart** from its **association with and attachment to the body?**

God did not mean for nor does he expect *one part* (and *individual*) to survive and function **apart** from *the body* any more than you would expect a *foot*, an *ear*, a *nose*, an *eye*, or a *hand* to survive and continue to properly function when no longer connected to *the body*.

So if we mean by “church” the local *body of Christ*, I’d say **it’s absolutely necessary**, as is our *individual* attachment to and function within it. Not only does the *individual Christian* have obligations to it, he/she also receives tremendous benefits from it—neither of which can or will be fulfilled anywhere else. (Philip C. Strong; Viking Drive Church of Christ; 3791 Viking Drive, Bossier City, LA; online at vikingdrivechurchofchrist.com; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)