**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 save 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)