

Must One Be A Member of the church of Christ to be Saved?

by Danny Brown

The term "church" sometimes refers to a local congregation. Paul, the apostle, wrote a letter to the "church of God which is at Corinth." Jesus wrote letters to seven churches in Asia, the church in Ephesus' the church in Smyrna; the church in Pergamum; the church in Thyatira; the church in Sardis; the church in Philadelphia and the church in Laodica. These were all local churches made up of members who have joined together to accomplish those things God would have His people do together. This is not the use of the term "church" as it is used in this study.

The term also refers to the church in the universal sense. For example, Jesus said, "Upon this rock, I will build my church." (Matt 16:18). Paul said, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it." The term "church" as it is used in these Scriptures and others refers to that body of people who belong to the Lord everywhere. The church in its universal sense has reference to the individual Christian's relationship to Christ. It has no earthly headquarters, no earthly organization and is not a denomination. Yet it is worldwide, is not limited by race, nationality, color, culture or ethnic background and will exist eternally. This is the sense in which we use the term "church" in this study.

Now we offer our reasons why we believe that the Bible teaches that the saved, those who have received the remission of sins, are in the church.

Reason No. 1: The Saved are added to the Church

Salvation is too essential and heaven too wonderful to miss. Both are conditional or everybody would be saved and have the hope of heaven. Jesus said,

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. (Mat 7:21)

Therefore, in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven each one must do the will of God. His will for man is found in His word, the Scriptures.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Tim 3:16-17)

The will of God, revealed in Scripture, teaches that all are to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. All the evidence necessary to establish faith in Jesus is given in

the Bible (Rom 10:17; John 5:32-39; John 20:30-31; Rom 1:3-4).

I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins. (John 8:24)

It is also God's will that all men everywhere repent. Repentance requires a change of mind that results in a change of action. It is a turn from sin to righteousness.

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. (Acts 17:30-31)

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (2 Pet 3:9)

It is God's will for every believer to confess with his mouth before witnesses that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (Rom 10:9-10)

And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. (Acts 8:37)

Not only is it God's will that each individual believe in Jesus as the Christ, repent of sins and confess his faith but also it is the will of God that each one be baptized in order to the remission of sins. Peter told the Jews, who were pricked in their heart by his preaching that Jesus was both Lord and Christ and when they asked what they were to do,

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. (Acts 2:38)

Anaias told Saul of Tarsus who was a penitent believer, "And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16)

Peter, in his first epistle, said that, "baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Christ." (1 Peter 3:21)

The Scriptures provide all the evidence necessary that men may believe that God is

and that Jesus Christ is His son. God wants to save men from their sins, not in their sins, so repentance is necessary. None should be ashamed to confess with the mouth what is believed in the heart, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Every accountable person is to be baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:3-4), wherein are all spiritual blessing (Eph 1:3), of which, the remission of sins is one. Those who do the will of God will be saved and added to the church.

Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. (Acts 2:47).

Notice that the adding was done by the Lord. None joined the church. They became members because the Lord added them. He adds the saved. He makes no mistakes. He does not add any one who is not saved. He does not fail to add anyone who is saved. Thus all the saved are in the church because they obeyed the will of God and Jesus added them to it.

Reason No. 2: Reconciled in One Body

"And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby. (Eph 2.16).

The word "reconcile" carries the meaning of "made friends again with." We are made friends again with God by the cross, and without the sacrifice of Christ none would be saved. However where does this passage say that those who have been reconciled to God by the cross are?. Inspiration says they are in the one body, which is the church (Col 1:18). So all the reconciled (saved) are in the one body (the church).

Reason No. 3: The Blood of Christ

"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins," (Eph 1:7).

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28).

Jesus purchased the church with his blood. What did he purchase? Not a building but he redeemed (purchased) lost souls. These redeemed souls (the saved) are the church that Jesus purchased with his own blood. That's what the church we read about in the New Testament is – the body of redeemed souls.

Reason No. 4: The Family of God

“But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” (1 Tim 3:15).

The term “house” refers to a household or family. In this passage it is the house of God, that is, the family of God. But the house or family of God is the church. Those who make up the family of God have God as their Father and enjoy His love. John said, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” (1 John 3:1) They enjoy His protection for He provides a way of escape when his children are tempted (1 Cor 10:13). He is a loving Father for He chastises or corrects His children (Heb 12:4-11). He has provided an inheritance for them also (Rom 8:17). Not only do they have God as their Father, but also have Christ as a brother (Rom 8:17). They also have a hundredfold brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers throughout the world (Matt 19:29). Question, Does God have children outside of His family? Are there children of God who are not in His family, the church? The obvious answer to both these questions is NO. The saved are the children of God and are in God’s house (family), the church.

Reason No. 5: The Body of Christ

And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all. (Ephesians 1:22-23)

Christ has only one body. (Eph. 4:4). It is, however, made up of many members and every one of them is important (Rom 12:4-8). Physically each member is joined to the head when it is a part of the body. Likewise, spiritually, each member is joined to the head only because he/she is in the body, the church. Those that are not a part of the body, the church, have no connection with the head of the body, Christ.

Reason No. 6: Justified

1. The saved are those who have been justified. (Rom 3:23-24).
2. The justified are those whom God has called. (Rom 8:30)
3. The called are in the one body. (Col 3:15)
4. The one body is the church (Eph 1:22-23; 4:4)
5. Therefore the saved are in the church.

Reason No. 7 Born Again - Enter Kingdom

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (John 3:3-5).

It is clear that the person born again "sees," that is, experiences, enters into the kingdom, the church. We understand that a born again person is a saved person. Thus every saved (born again) person enters the church (kingdom). No born again person is outside the church.

Reason No. 8: Translated into the Kingdom

"Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:" (Col 1:13).

By this he revealed that there are only two spiritual kingdoms: Satan's and Christ's. One is either a member of one or the other. There is no middle ground where one can engage in the sins of Satan's kingdom while reaping the blessings of Christ's kingdom, which results in eternal life in heaven. There is no such place. Each individual is either in Satan's kingdom or Christ's kingdom. When one is saved he leaves the kingdom of darkness and enters the kingdom of God's dear Son, the church. It is God who translates us from one realm to the other. He does not make any mistakes. All those who are not yet saved are in Satan's kingdom and all those who are saved are in the church, Christ's kingdom.

Conclusion

The church is important. It is the body of Christ to which the saved are added. It is the kingdom into which the born again are translated. It is the body of those reconciled by the cross of Christ. It is the family of God wherein are the children of God. Jesus thought it was important enough that he gave His blood to purchase it. As important as it is, the church is not our saviour. Jesus is the saviour. "He is the saviour of the body." (Eph 5:23). The body is the church (Eph 1:22-23). Thus Jesus is the saviour of the church. Jesus is the saviour. The church is the saved.

You, too, can be a member of the church of which Jesus is the saviour. Be obedient to the will of God – Hear the gospel, Believe in Jesus as the Christ, the son of God, Repent of your sins and be baptized in the name of Christ for the remission of sins. The Lord

will add you to His church, which He purchased with His blood on the cross.