

We Believe in The Body of Christ-The Church Ephesians 1:22-23, Ephesians 2:19-22

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Over the past few weeks, we've looked at the basics of our Christian beliefs. We've considered God's natural revelation of Himself, how we believe in God because our observation of the world demands it.

We looked at our belief in the Word of God, the Bible, through which we come to know Him and His plan for us.

We looked at Jesus, God the Son, through whom God showed His love by sending Him into the world to save us from our sins.

We looked at God the Holy Spirit, by whom we're convicted of our sins and how the Spirit is the seal or guarantee of our salvation, and we looked at God's grace and mercy by which we're saved through faith.

But how are we to live? God didn't leave us alone. We have His presence through His Holy Spirit, but Jesus also gave us the Church, through which we live in community with one-another and through which we're to grow and serve.

That's why Jesus never called anyone to be a lone ranger Christian. Church membership isn't an option. Paul instructs us in 1 Corinthians 12:27, *"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."*

As a believer in Jesus, we're His earthly body and, as Christians, we can't live apart from the body.

If I were to pluck out my eyes, or cut off my hand, that eye or hand would die. The same is true if we cut ourselves off from the body of Christ.

Most of Paul's letter to the Ephesians dealt with the community of believers, the Church.

So, today we're going to look at a small portion of the instructions he gave in that letter.

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D. L. Moody was visiting a prominent Chicago citizen one cold, winter day when the subject of church membership and involvement came up.

"I believe I can be just as good a Christian outside the church as I can be inside it," the man said.

Moody said nothing. Instead, he moved to the fireplace, blazing against the winter outside, removed one burning coal and placed it on the hearth.

The two men sat together and watched the ember die out. *"I see,"* the other man said.

Understand, church membership, by itself, never saved anyone. But once saved, a Christian will never be effective and live up to the potential God intended without being part of a church.

If we're called to come to Jesus, to be a born-again believer, we're also called to the church, to be the church, and to become a functioning part of the body.

As we look through the New Testament, the church is central to Paul's overall message.

The instructions given by Paul are to the church, not to individual members. How we're to act and how we're to care for one another is all in context of the church.

Listen to how Paul describes the church:

Ephesians 1:22b-23a, “...*the church, which is His body*”

Ephesians 2:19, “...*members of His [God’s] household*”

Ephesians 2:21, “...*a holy temple in the Lord*”

Ephesians 2:22, “...*a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*”

The church, by its very name in the Greek, deals with a gathering of God’s people. The Greek word, from which we translate “church,” is “*ekklesia*,” which translated means assembly.

Yet, “*Ekklesia*” means more than just an assembly of people, it means people assembled for a purpose.

We, as individuals, are the assembled people of God gathered for a purpose and one of those purposes is for corporate worship as we’re doing today.

The writer of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 10:24-25, “*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*”

We stimulate one another to love and good deeds when we’re together, not when we’re apart. We’re clearly instructed to not forsake gathering together.

In fact, we need to be all the more anxious to come together, as the writer of Hebrews says, “*as you see the Day approaching.*”

What day is that? That day when Jesus returns. Look around, we’re closer than ever.

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In the Old Testament, God met the people in the Temple. The structure was built for that purpose. In the Holy of Holies, God met with the priest once a year.

The priest chosen for that honor would enter with a rope tied around his leg so, if he fell dead or faint, he could be pulled out without anyone entering the Holy of Holies.

When Christ died on the cross, the veil in the temple, which isolated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the world, was torn (from the top to the bottom, Matthew 27:51) opening up our access to Him.

Now, in the New Testament, God lives in His people. We're His temple. Jesus said in Matthew 18:20, *"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."*

This is a prime reason I look forward to Sunday, the presences of Jesus, His Holy Spirit, when we're gathered for worship.

Ephesians 1:22–23, *"And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."*

He, God the Father, put all things in the entire universe under Jesus' feet. In this passage, Paul's paraphrasing Psalm 8:6 where it said all things will be *"under His feet."*

Jesus is the ruler over everything, though He's not exercising it yet because men are still in rebellion, but the day's coming.

Philippians 2:9–11, *"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the*

earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

One day every knee will bow and acknowledge Jesus as Lord. Those who do so now, will make a difference in eternity.

Since Jesus is the head of the church and, as we've seen, *“the church, which is His body”* is you and me. We're Christ's body here on earth.

Colossians 1:18, *“And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.”*

Jesus is the head. We turn to Him for guidance and direction through His Holy Spirit. We don't have a pope, or human, presiding over the church. Our CEO is Jesus.

As such, the church government is a type of democracy in which we, as believers, filled with the same Holy Spirit, seek together the will of God for this local assembly of His body.

We run into problems when we don't do things in His fullness.

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The church, the assembly of His body, are also fellow citizens of heaven.

Ephesians 2:19, *“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household.”*

An interesting use of words here. In 1 Peter, Peter tells us we're strangers and aliens in this world. We're just passing through, but Paul's saying the opposite.

To understand what Paul's saying, we must understand the context. The church in Ephesus was an assembly of Jews, Greeks, Romans, slaves and free, different nationalities, cultures, and economic statuses.

In the church, we're all equal before God. Paul tells us in Galatians 3:28, *"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*

In the world we have racial strife and cultural divides, not so in the church. We *"are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people."*

This is another reason why the church is so important, where else can we be on equal footing with everyone.

It doesn't matter who you are, rich or poor, black or white, male or female, we are equal before God and in this place, we're on equal footing with one another.

If not, we should be since among the assembly of God's people, we're equal with one another. We're all equal members of God's household.

This is why we call one another brothers and sisters in Christ. In Paul's day, this was huge.

No other element in society was anything like the church. No wonder the downtrodden in that world flocked to the church.

Ephesians 2:19b–21, *"His household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord."*

We're not just any gathering of people. We're not a social club, a country club, a masonic lodge, a civic organization like the Kiwanis or the Rotary Clubs, or even the Chamber of Commerce.

Our foundation is Jesus. *"Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone."*

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Conclusion

This is what we need to understand. Jesus is the cornerstone. A cornerstone is the stone that's laid first. It's the one from which all the rest of the building is based and from which all measurements are made.

"The foundation of the apostles and prophets" is all based on their teaching concerning Jesus. Prophets here is a reference to New Testament prophets, not Old Testament.

So, what are they teaching and prophesying? 1 Corinthians 3:11, *"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."*

It's all about Jesus and we're all about Jesus. We're His body and as such we're compared to stones building up the house of God, *"in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord."*

So now the analogy changes from parts of a body to that of building materials. We're the stones or bricks of God's house. Peter, in his letter, says the same thing.

1 Peter 2:4–5, *"As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy*

priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

Are you getting the picture? We can't leave out any part of the body, we can't leave out a rock or brick, we can't leave out any part of the structure to the temple.

We're part of one another. We belong together. There's no call in all of scripture for us to be alone.

Ephesians 2:22, “And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

We together are the body of Christ, the dwelling place of God Himself. If God dwells in the church, why would we not want to be where God's present?

To be built together is an active thing. You're not being built into the structure of the God's holy temple if all you do is come, sit, and leave.

If that's all you do, then you've just visited God's temple, you're not a part of His temple. To be part, you must be here, you must be active.

I understand that not everyone can teach, but everyone can serve. This is the place where you use the gifts that God's given you. Together we're to affect the world.

In a family, each member has their own chores to do. The same is true in God's household. What's your part in the body? What's your chore as part of the family.

Being an active member of the body of Christ isn't an option for the saved believer in Jesus. Apart from the assembly, we grow cold and non-functional.

Do you long for the fellowship missed when you are away? We grow and worship together. Together we can change the world.