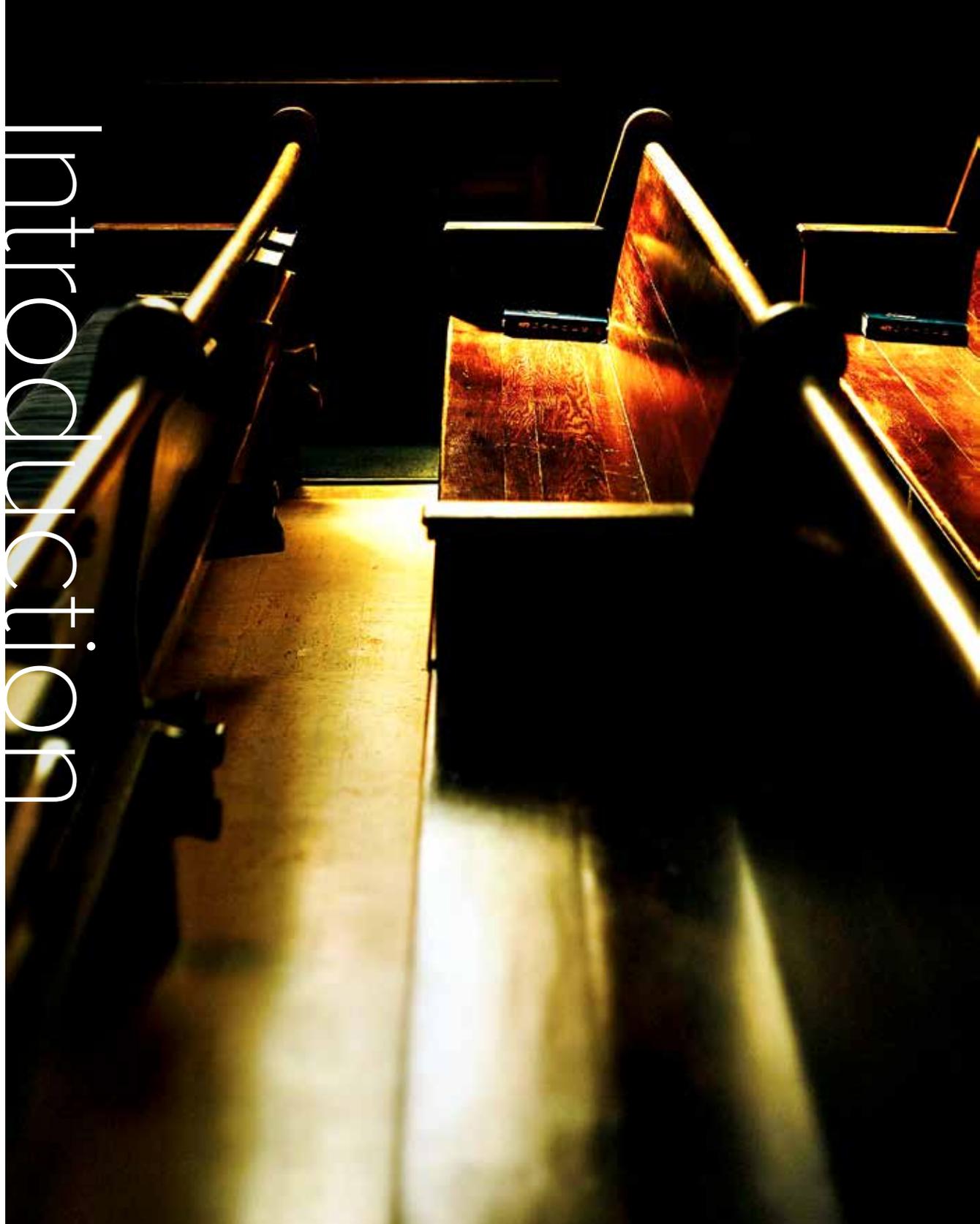


Introduction



WHY DO I NEED THE CHURCH?

Spirituality is not declining in America, but church affiliation is. Even those whose spirituality is grounded in the tenets of Christianity may question the value of the church. We hear things like, “I love Jesus, so why do I need the church?” Such thinking overlooks the great truth of the purpose of the church. Through faith in Christ, God gives us a new identity through Jesus and a new family in His church. Commitment to the church is a non-negotiable part of Christian discipleship; by neglecting the church we will miss the great benefits and opportunities that come from being affiliated with and committed to God’s people.

In our study, we will explore Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians. We’re going to see how God’s encouragement to these first-century Christians still instructs our twenty-first century lives today.

During our time together, we’ll discuss the following more deeply:

- ▶ We are joined together.
- ▶ We pray for one another.
- ▶ We support one another.
- ▶ We encourage one another.
- ▶ We strengthen one another.
- ▶ We stand together in spiritual battle.

Let’s dive in and see why we need the church—and why the church needs us.

CHRIS JAMES

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How “Why Do I Need the Church?” supports the Discipleship Plan (see page 129):

Serve God and Others. As we deepen our understanding of God’s call to the church—His body—we discover we are not alone in our service and ministry. Our service is enhanced—even multiplied—as we walk alongside and support one another.

Why Do I Need the Church?

Session 1 **We Are Joined Together** Ephesians 1:20-23; 2:8-10,19-22

Session 2 **We Pray for One Another** Ephesians 3:14-21

Session 3 **We Support One Another** Ephesians 4:1-7,11-16

Session 4 **We Encourage One Another** Ephesians 4:17-32

Session 5 **We Strengthen One Another** Ephesians 5:8-21

Session 6 **We Stand Together in Spiritual Battle** Ephesians 6:10-20

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We Are Joined Together



QUESTION 1:

When have you felt most at home with a group of people?

THE POINT

When we come to Christ,
we also become a part of
the body of Christ.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

A few years ago, I visited Muir Woods National Monument—known for its beautiful California redwoods.

Dwarfing other tree species, redwoods can grow to over 350 feet high and can be as wide as 24 feet in diameter.

Yet, as massive as these trees are, redwoods possess remarkably shallow root systems. But the roots overcome their lack of depth by extending outward more than 100 feet from the tree's base. Each tree's roots then intertwine with the roots of other redwoods. By joining together, the individual root systems create a forest of trees with staggering strength.

The simple reality is that redwood trees were not created to exist in isolation—and neither were we. Just as a redwood tree requires a forest of other redwood trees in order to stand, so also the Christian requires a spiritual family in order to grow. The church—the body of Christ—is that family. Being a part of Christ's church is not an option. Through Jesus, God designed us to live and serve together as His body.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

EPHESIANS 1:20-23

²⁰ He exercised this power in Christ by raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens—²¹ far above every ruler and authority, power and dominion, and every title given, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

²² And he subjected everything under his feet and appointed him as head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.

The New Testament writers used various metaphors to describe God’s church, such as flock, temple, household, gathering, and so forth. But the most frequently used metaphor is “the body.” Through this picture, we learn that each Christ-follower is a member (or part) of the body while Jesus Christ is the head. Bodies can have multiple hands, feet, fingers, toes, ears, eyes, hairs, and even kidneys. But a body possesses only one head. So, if the church is considered a body and that body can have just one head, then it only makes sense that Jesus would be the head.

As its head, Jesus holds ultimate authority over the church. His authority is not dictatorial, oppressive, arrogant, or abusive—but it is absolute. Someone might ask, “How is it that Jesus gets absolute authority over the church (and everything else for that matter)?” Jesus’ authority was neither received by democratic vote nor granted by a council’s affirmation; His authority has no root in human decision at all. Jesus received His authority as a demonstration of God’s power. In other words, Jesus’ authority is all about who He is as the Son of God. Consider what this passage tells us about God’s demonstration of His power through His Son, Jesus:

QUESTION 2:

How is being a part of a church different from being a part of any other organization?

- ▶ God raised Jesus from the dead.
- ▶ God seated Jesus at His right hand in a place of authority over every other ruler.
- ▶ God put everything under Jesus’ authority.

- ▶ God gave Jesus an eternal rule—not only in this age, but also in the one to come.
- ▶ God appointed Jesus as head over everything for the church.
- ▶ God appointed Jesus to fill all things in every way; in other words, everything finds its purpose in Jesus.

Through His power, God pronounced Jesus as the infinitely superior Ruler of all things—including His role as head of the church. This means no human leader stands as the ultimate authority in your local church. Although God has ordained offices to exist in the local church, no pastor or board serves as head. Only Jesus sits at the right hand of

God in the seat of ultimate authority as head of His church. All human leaders are to look to Jesus, follow His example, teach His Word, and submit to His leadership.

The word *everything* also teaches us that believers cannot compartmentalize life so that Jesus is head over some things and not over others. We can't allow Jesus to be Lord over a "Sunday" side of us but also have an "every other day" side of us where He's not Lord. Whether we're obeying Jesus all alone in our workplaces or serving Jesus together through our church, we need the life-giving sustenance that only He can give.

EPHESIANS 2:8-10

⁸ For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—⁹ not from works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.

In most clubs and organizations, you sign up to become a member. You pay the dues. You attend the meetings. Then, you go to work on the club's agenda. Unfortunately, we're often tempted to approach the church with a similar mindset. The Bible teaches us a radically different method for membership in His body. Membership in the body of Christ is not about what we do to get in. Instead, it's about what Jesus has done to bring us in. Few passages of Scripture sum up Jesus' work on our behalf like Ephesians 2:8-9:

- ▶ **We are saved.** The need to be saved implies peril. We normally don't cry out for rescue from a party or game night. We cry for help when our lives are in danger.
- ▶ **We are saved by grace!** Grace describes God's undeserved favor toward sinful humanity. The One we've sinned against initiates the salvation we need.
- ▶ **We are saved by grace through faith.** Some people think faith is simply a shot in the dark, an intellectual leap, or



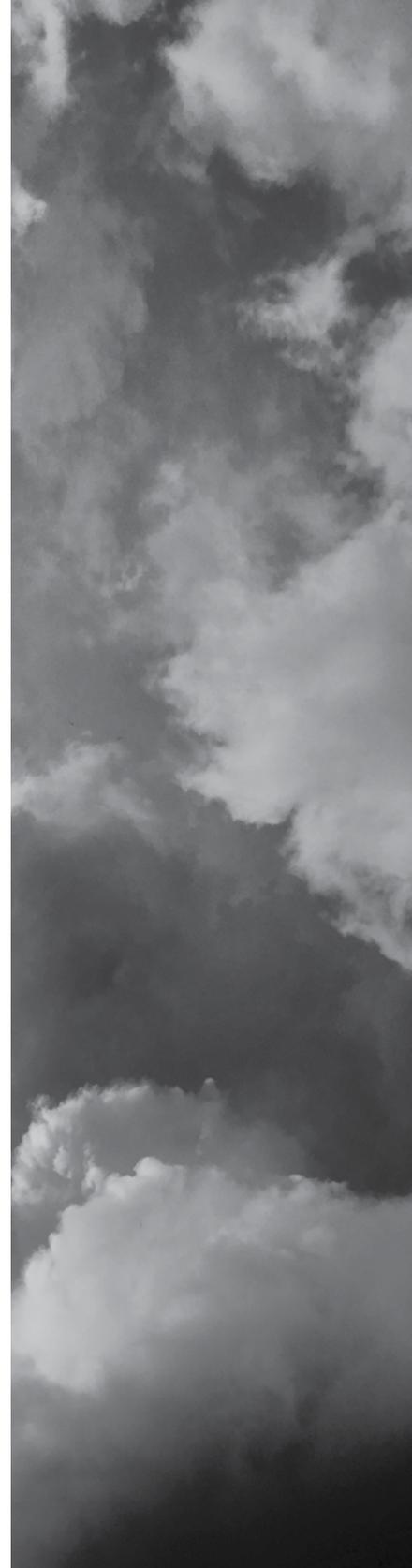
just believing without seeing. That's not how the Bible describes faith. Faith is accepting the truth about who Jesus is and what He has done to reconcile us to God.

▶ **Every aspect of our salvation is God's gift to us—not work done by us.** Twice in this passage, Paul reminded us that no work on our part can earn salvation. Rather, the entire process is a gift of God's grace. We don't enter Christ's church by paying dues, signing a roster, or performing good works. God's sovereign, merciful, and gracious work on our behalf enable us to be saved and to come into His church.

Why does God save sinners like you and me? We might think it's simply because He loves us. God most certainly loves us, but He saves us for a bigger reason than just to display His love. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (v. 10). Do you see that distinction? God doesn't save us by our good works; He saves us for His good works. God saves us to show His divine handiwork. Through our redeemed lives, He displays for the world His character, love, and glory. And the local church is the place where He does that best.

QUESTION 3:

What's the relationship between grace, faith, and works?



EPHESIANS 2:19-22

¹⁹ So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you are also being built together for God’s dwelling in the Spirit.

God has always had a people. The Old Testament records God calling Israel to Himself. They were God’s chosen people among the nations (the Gentiles). God commanded the Jews to obey Him, tell of His greatness, and believe His promises—the greatest of which was the promise of salvation for both Jew and Gentile alike.

God set His people apart from the nations to be a witness to the nations. But rather than obeying and believing, Israel continually disobeyed and disbelieved. And rather than allowing their chosen status to be a blessing to the nations, many used it as a tool of derision against the nations.

But because of their faith in Christ, the Gentile believers were brought near and were “no longer foreigners and strangers.” Although foreigners and strangers possessed some legal rights, they lacked the full rights of citizenship. Spiritually, the Jews felt superior while the Gentiles felt inferior. But Paul shattered both of these feelings by pointing to the uniting work of the gospel.

Great diversity exists in the family of God, but we hold a mutual responsibility of togetherness. God built us together to be

His dwelling. Each follower of Christ in your church is a brick in the temple of God. He takes those individual bricks and forges us together by the mortar of His gospel.

QUESTION 4:

What are the responsibilities and blessings of being a member of God’s household?

Our culture is becoming increasingly individualistic. It’s hard not to allow that reality to affect the way we view the church. But Scripture presents a radically different approach. The church is not simply about me or my needs. The church is God’s household—His family. It’s the Body for whom Christ died. And when we come to Christ, we also become a part of the body of Christ.

QUESTION 5:

How has the church played a significant role in your life?

WHERE DO I FIT IN?

Today's text portrays the church as the body of Christ and the house of God. Considering these metaphors, describe how you might fit into each portrait:

As part of Christ's body, I would be the _____ . I fit in by doing this:

As part of God's house, I would be the _____ . I fit in this way:

Offer a prayer thanking God for making it possible to fit into His purpose.

“Church attendance is as vital to a disciple as a transfusion of rich, healthy blood to a sick man.”

DWIGHT L. MOODY

