

MUST ONE BE A MEMBER OF THE BODY TO BE SAVED?

In recent articles we have proven, from Scripture, the requirement for one true church. We have discussed the great divisions present in the religious world today and shown that such divisions are displeasing to God. We have also demonstrated that Scripture gives proper names for the one true body which is called the church. We now ask if one must become a part of that body to be pleasing to God. As always, we will not offer opinions, but Bible text for our answers.

Ephesians 4:4-6 asserts that there is but one body: *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."* One chapter later, in Ephesians 5:23, the Bible says that *"...Christ is the head of the church and is the saviour of the body."* Colossians 1: 18 makes clear that the church and the body are identical: *"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."* Also: *"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 fulness of him that filleth all in all."* We can now easily agree that Christ is both the head of the church and its savior.

This body, or church, belongs unto God through Jesus Christ. Paul explains its ownership in Acts 20:28: *"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."* The church is described as His *"purchased possession"* in Ephesians 1:14. But what we may ask, requires us to be part of the body or the church? Can't we have salvation without the church? Some may boast: "I am a Christian, but I don't believe in 'organized' religion!" Sadly for the boaster, one cannot choose one without the other. Here is why.

Man's eternal problem is sin. It is sin which caused mankind to be cast from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:22-24). Sin separates man from God (Isaiah 59:2). If man is separated from God, then he cannot be where God is which will be the New Heaven that John wrote of in Revelation 21:1-7.

Follow carefully now. Speaking of the Israelites and the Gentiles alike, Paul notes that before Jesus, man was without hope: *That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world"* Ephesians 2:12. But, Paul continues in the next verse, the blood of Christ changed all that and now you are close, you do have hope: *But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ"* (Ephesians 2:13). Next, we find that Christ is a peacemaker between man and God: *"For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace"* (Ephesians 2:14,15). Jesus made peace between Jew and Gentile, yes, but He does far more than that.

We know that His blood is the instrument of our pardon and the purchase price of our salvation, but where does man find reunion with God? How does he overcome the separation caused by sin, Where is he reconciled with God? Paul answers in the next four verses.

"And that he might reconcile both (Jews and Gentiles -JBE) unto God in one body (the church – JBE) by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:16-19).

Paul said we are **"reconciled in one body."** We are reconciled no where else but in the one body. We have already seen that there is but one body and that Jesus is the Savior of that body. Therefore, the problem of sin and the ensuing separation from God is handled in the body, or we can say, in the church. We are reconciled finding "...access unto the Father..." and we become "fellowcitizens."

In writing to the Romans Paul calls Christians *"children of God"* (Romans 8:16). In the next verse he describes us as *"heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ"* (Romans 8:17). Can we imagine anything more wonderful than to be an heir of the Creator and a joint-heir with our Savior? All of this is possible because Jesus reconciled us to God by His blood through the church. Thanks unto God for reaching out to us!

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NEXT WEEK: HOW DOES ONE GET INTO THE BODY?