



UNITED TO THE FAMILY OF GOD

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United in the Family of God

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Welcome Home

When we accept Jesus as our Savior, we join a new family ... “God’s family”. This is one of the biggest gifts we receive. Now we have a Heavenly Father and many brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. If you are the only Christian in your earthly family, you shouldn’t feel alone because you have a big spiritual family.

The Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 2:19 “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizen with God’s people and members of God’s household.” The family we belong to is the church.

What does the word “Church” mean?

There is a lot of confusion related to what the word “church” means. Some people say, “let’s go to church” referring to the place or building where Christian people gather together. When the Bible uses the word “church,” it means people who have received new life in Christ. In other words, they are God’s sons and daughters.

Therefore, the church is not the place or building where the believers gather together to worship God, but the group of persons who have believed and accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

The word “church” just means “assembly,” and the New Testament writers use the term to refer to the followers of the Lord Jesus. When we talk about “church,” we may refer to a congregation of believers from a certain community (called a “local church” as well); or to a group of believers

who gather together in a house or another place; or to the “universal church”, which is the total of believers around the world, including those who have died, whose names are written in the eternal book of life (Philippians 4:3). The church is local as well as universal.

Different than any other community or organization, the church is an “alive” organism. The Bible says that it is the body of Christ, and all who have accepted the call to be followers of Jesus are part of that body.

The Church of the Nazarene is part of this great universal church, and has as its important objectives, “holy Christian fellowship, the conversion of sinners, the entire sanctification of believers, their up building in holiness, and the simplicity and spiritual power manifest in the primitive New Testament Church, together with the preaching of the gospel to every creature.” (Nazarene Church Manual)

How was the church born?

God created man and woman to live **G**in a perfect relationship with Him. However, humans decided to turn their backs on God, go their own way, and become enemies of their Creator. This intention of becoming their own gods, and refusing God's sovereignty over their lives, took them into a life of slavery under the domain of sin and all its consequences, including death and eternal suffering far from God's presence. The Bible tells us that God took the initiative, and in his great love looked for all the possible ways of liberating men from sin's slavery.

God formed a nation to announce to the world his love, mercy and salvation. That was the reason why God looked for and called Abraham (Genesis 12:1-9), to raise up through him a great nation that would announce to all the people of the earth not only the horrible consequences of sin, but also the good news of salvation from sin. In time, Abraham's descendants

ended up becoming the great nation of Israel, but regrettably, it moved away from the purpose for which God formed them. To help them, God sent his servants, the prophets, who announced that God would form a new nation that would serve him. That nation is the church that our Lord Jesus founded. (1 Peter 2: 9-10)

The church came from God's heart. He sent his son Jesus Christ to give his life as a sacrifice, and in this way became the Lord and master of the church. It's nice to know that God's love for each one of us is the reason why He gave his own son to die on the cross. And just as the Father gave himself to Jesus Christ, in the same way Jesus Christ gave himself for the church "to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word" (Ephesians 5: 25-26). Having been purchased by the blood of Jesus, and receiving Him as Savior, you and I belong to him. God is Lord and Master of us, His church (1 Corinthians 6:20).

The historical moment that is marked as the launch of the Christian Church to the

world is the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The church began its ministry baptized with the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ had promised the Holy Spirit to his disciples (John 16: 5-16). The Spirit of God gives power to the church for living in obedience to God's Word and for carrying out the purpose for why it was put into this world.

The Unity of the Church

Paul affirms in 1 Corinthians 12:27 that the church is Christ's Body, "Now you are the body of Christ, and individual members of it." He also affirms this in Colossians 1:18 "He is also the head of the body, the church." Christ is the head, not only in the sense of being the one who gives origin or life to the church, but also because he is the one who governs and guides it. Therefore, if we are united to Christ, we are also united to each other, and we have a responsibility to and for each other."

This comparison between the church and the human body helps us understand

clearly the great diversity that exists among the people who make up the church. The hands have their own function. A foot works in coordination with the other foot. The eyes, ears, mouth, and each part of the body has an important function, and depends on one of the others for its survival. All the parts of the body exist together equally, not one being better than the other. In the same way, the members of God's body must respect and accept each other, helping each other grow.

On the other hand, when we say the church is only one body, we realize that the church should not be considered only as a numeric group of believers or small groups of isolated believers. The church is to be a united community that gathers for worship. The church shares common bonds of spiritual life, suffering, commitment, faith and service. The local church consists of each local group of believers.

Christ is the one who gives growth to the church as the members cooperate. "From him the whole body, joined and held

together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” (Ephesians 4:16)

Jesus Christ wants the church to be united (John 17:21). This doesn't require a combining of all the churches or local groups, but it suggests the existence of a common purpose. We can only have true unity if we come closer to Christ, preach his Gospel, and live as he would live in our place.

The purpose for the existence of the church in the world:

If the church is a divine creation founded by Christ and composed of all those who have received new life in Christ, why was it created? The Bible teaches us that God has also given to his people special abilities called gifts. He has given these gifts for his people to carry out a special service or purpose for which God has called him or her. God's purposes for his church are explained in the Great Commandment

and The Great Commission (Mathew 22: 37-40, 28: 18-20). These purposes can be grouped in 5 areas: Worship, Fellowship, Evangelism, Discipleship, and Training for service. Let's see what each one of these purposes consists of.

Worship. God is looking for people who will worship him (John 4:23) and love him over everything else (Mathew 4:10). Everything we do, individually or as church, should be an act of worship where God can show his glory to the world (1 Corinthians 10: 31). God has called us to be a “sacrifice of praise” (Hebrews 13: 15). The Bible instructs us to talk with other believers with “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” (Ephesians 5:19). When we meet as the church, we pray and listen to God’s Word. These are forms of worship. We also worship when we participate together in Communion and Baptism of new believers.

Fellowship. The word “fellowship” means companionship. Jesus calls his disciples “friends” (John 15:14). In fact, this friendship with Jesus is what made the

church into a community of love and care - a community that was willing to share with each other. Love for one another should be the distinctive mark of the church (John 13:35).

Evangelism. God has saved us to “proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). Gospel means the announcement of the good news of salvation that God has provided in Christ. People who don't yet belong to God's people have many needs of all types, and we shouldn't ignore them. But the biggest need that people have is to hear the Gospel and accept the good news of salvation. People need more than ever to have a face to face encounter with God's love. They need to have God in their lives. As the church of Christ, our principal service to the world is preaching the good news of salvation. No other organization does this work. This is the exclusive mission of the church. All believers must be involved in the work of the gospel. Some people will evangelize by inviting their friends to church, home

Bible studies, prayer cells, or family groups. Others evangelize by testifying to what God has done in their lives or by preaching the Good News. Others contribute with finances as gifts of God's love. Others present the good news by giving clothes or food to those in need, or by taking care of sick people. Some people share through music or other ministries in the church. We must do this together as the body of Christ. By participating and being together, God will help many people to be saved and His church will grow. (1 Corinthians 3:5-9, Ephesians 4:16)

Discipleship. Teaching new believers is the center of the Great Commission that the Lord Jesus entrusted to all his followers: "teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you" (Mathew 28:20). Every member of the church is responsible for sharing what he has learned with others (1 Corinthians 14:31, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Hebrews 10:25) One effective way of teaching is through small group Bible studies. These provide an excellent atmosphere for this mutual

ministry (service).

The apostle Paul refers to this teaching when he affirms that we should “build up the church” (1 Corinthians 14:12). We do this when we gather together, when we encourage, when we comfort each other (v.3), etc. Every meeting of the church must be for building up the body (v.26). In the church, we are all to be disciples. A disciple is a person who learns and applies God’s word to his daily life. The early church was recognized in the community where they lived because “they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer” (Acts 2:42).

Training for service. The second greatest commandment is about loving one’s neighbor (Mathew 22:39). Paul writes: “Therefore, as we have opportunity, we must work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10). Our obligation is to help the rest of the people in their needs. Help the people who are closest to us, like our family

in the flesh and brothers and sisters of God's family, like we help the person who lives in the furthest place. Therefore, all Christians should be trained so that we can put to good use the abilities and talents that God has given to us. It's the responsibility of the church to train every believer so that they can be actively involved in the ministry to which God has called them and enabled them with gifts of the Spirit. Every Christian has a vocation in Christ and a call to service. (Mathew 28:18-20)

¿Why do we need to belong to a local church?

There are many people who are Christians but who don't want to be part of a church. These people cheat themselves because the New Testament clearly states that Christians are to gather together. (Hebrews 10:25)

The apostle Paul repeatedly encourages Christians to have fellowship with each other, to encourage one another, and

have friendship with each other. This is almost impossible if the believers do not gather together (Romans 12:10, 15:7, 1 Corinthians 12:25, Galatians 5:13, Ephesians 4:32, Philippians 2:3, Colossians 3:13, 1 Thessalonians 5:13). In the church, we find a place where we learn how to serve.

Another reason why we need to belong to a local church is because it gives us a sense of belonging to a group that supports us and helps us to stay in biblical truth and not dragged away by strange ideas. In the church, we learn truths that otherwise we couldn't learn for ourselves. We also receive practical valuable advice for confronting difficult situations in our lives.

Being a part of the church permits us to receive the care of our pastors and brothers and sisters in the faith. They watch out for our progress and perseverance in Christian life and discipleship. We must remember that we have started a new spiritual life, and we need to grow day by day. When we are new believers, we require care and attention according to our needs. It is for

that reason that each of the meetings and ministries of the church are instruments that God uses to help us in our life.

However, the most important reason for which each believer should participate in a local church is because the church needs the believer. The new believer is affirmed in her Christian life as she is involved more and more in the ministries of the church. When believers are not involved in the work of the church, the healthy growth of the church suffers gravely in all areas (1Corinthians 12: 4-7).

Finally, as members of a church, we also have the privilege of contributing to the ministry of the church in our local community and throughout the world through our offerings and tithes (Malachi 3:10). These gifts of love to the church are part of our worship to God as we share with others from the blessings He has given to us. The church is a family where we help each other. And in that mutual help we have the privilege of serving God with all that we are and all that He has given us.

Why do Christians gather together on Sundays?

From the time of the creation of the world, according to the command of God, believers have dedicated one day of the week to rest, worship and the learning of God's Word. This day was called the Sabbath, or day of rest. God commanded this because He rested from his work of creation on the seventh day (Genesis 2:2-3)

In the fourth of the Ten Commandments, God commands: "Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy." The rest that was established by God has a sacred value. God invites people not only to rest physically, but also to rest "in the Lord." We rest in the Lord by praising him, by giving him thanks, and having an intimacy of love with Him.

The Christians of the New Testament celebrated the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ on Sunday (John 20:26; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2, Revelation 1:10). This celebration took the place of the Sabbath

rest that had been on Saturday. Now Sunday is called “the day of the Lord.”

It was Sunday as well that began to mark the rhythm of the life of the Christians. The first Christians specifically dedicated the first day of the week to worshipping the Lord, having communion with each other, and participating together in worshipping God as his people.

That’s why Sunday is the day that Jesus Christ’s followers are called to remember the salvation that he has received thanks to Jesus’ sacrifice. That’s the reason for celebration for the Christian. And it’s not only a memory of an event that happened a long time ago, but also the trust that the resurrected Jesus Christ is with his disciples now (“for where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there among them” - Mathew 18:20), and he will come to be with them forever (Mathew 28: 20).

How can I join the Church?

Christ's church is composed of all the people who have received new life in Jesus Christ. Therefore, to be able to be part of the church, we need to be born again by admitting and regretting our sins, accepting Christ as our personal Savior, and recognizing him as our Lord.

To be a member of a Church of the Nazarene, we should declare openly the experience of our salvation, believe firmly in the biblical truths that the church teaches, and commit to participate actively in the ministries of the church with its leaders and pastors.

Conclusion

Think about a boy who has lived without the affection of his parents since he was a child, maybe looking every day where to spend the night, many times without something to eat. And suddenly, a man appears in his life telling him: "Come with me. I want to provide you with a home, a place where you will have the father's love and the affection of many people who, like you, have suffered a long time, but today enjoy his protection, a place to sleep, food, and affection... of a family."

Possibly if you were that boy, you wouldn't believe it. It would not be easy to understand why someone would make this gratuitous offer to you. However, it's true. That's God's plan for you. "God loved us so much that He decided to send Jesus Christ to adopt us as his children, because he had planned this from the beginning" (Ephesians 1:4-6).

Being a member of the family of God is a great privilege that we don't deserve.

When receiving him, we must make a commitment to attract everyone we can to our new family, the church. We make this in companionship with the body of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

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UNITED TO THE FAMILY OF GOD

When we accept Jesus as our Savior, we are integrated into a new family, the “Family of God.”

This is one of the greatest gifts that we can receive. Now, we have a Heavenly Father and a great number of brothers and sisters in Christ.

In this book, you will find answers to many of your questions about this important theme. You will discover how the church was born, its purpose in the world today, why we should belong to it, and the reason Christians worship on Sundays.

