HOW IMPORTANT IS THE CHURCH?

It is troubling that there are many who claim respect for the Bible, and claim faith in Christ, but have chosen to regard the church as an option. Statements are often heard such as, "My religion is a personal religion. I don't need a church to feel close to God." These see little importance in the church—at least for themselves. How should we respond to this concept?

In the first place, one's feelings on the matter may be irrelevant. God's prophet, Jeremiah, declared, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). In other words, to trust one's feelings would be to listen to a liar.

In the second place, religion is greatly over-valued. Jesus didn't come to make us religious. Universally, man has always been religious. Even worshipers of Satan are religious. They were religious people who cried out against Christ, saying, "Crucify Him!"

In the third place, most have a totally flawed view of what the Bible speaks of as the church. The church is not seen in Scripture as a denomination, or an aggregate of denominations. Many are turned away by what is sometimes referred to as "organized religion." Denominational structures and alliances are man-made sectarian fellowships bound together by human creeds and rules of faith and practice. The New Testament church was divided only by location, with no central headquarters, and had no sectarian allegiance to a religious party. Partyism within the one body was carnal, not spiritual (1 Cor. 3:3-4). The church was not something they joined, but it was a body of people who responded to the gospel (good news) of Christ in faith, repenting of their sins, and being baptized (immersed) in acceptance of the remission of sins. Of such it is said, "The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Read Acts 2:36-47). The church is not an organization, like a country club, that one might choose to join, but it is the universal fellowship of those who have committed themselves to Christ to serve and obey Him.

The importance of this relationship is seen in the fact that the church was purchased by the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28), and is spoken of as Christ's body, of which He alone is head (Colossians 1:18). The endearment with which Christ loves the church is seen in the apostle Paul's comparison of Jesus' relationship with the church to the relationship of a man with his wife, even giving His life for her (Eph. 5:22-33).

Had the first Christians regarded their relationship to Christ as "a personal religion" apart from other believers, it would have been contrary to Christ who promised, in anticipation of this redeemed community, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). Rather, from the first they "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, the fellowship, the breaking of bread and in prayers" (Acts 2:42), also "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs…" (Col. 3:16). Had they not been diligent in this, surely the Christian faith would have been quickly snuffed out. Christians need one another, and are to worship and work together in the body of Christ. We are

admonished, "Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25).

The church is obviously important to the Lord. The question is: Is the church important to **you?**

--Ron