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| **The Hope of the World is the real reason for Church** |

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| Acts 2:42-47: **"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions, they gave to anyone as He had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."**         What is the church?         To some people, the church is nothing more than a social institution - a kind of 'religious club' that some people choose to be a part of. While they may acknowledge that the church has done some good over the years, they see it as no different than organizations like the Red Cross. To them, there is nothing special about the church.         Others see the church as an antiquated relic of times gone by. According to them, the church is no longer relevant to today's culture. It doesn't speak to contemporary needs. They see the church as a kind of institution - a once a week tradition that some people still hold onto. To them, the church has outlived its effectiveness.         Still others would say that the church is almost a malevolent force in our culture. In the past few years, men like Richard Dawkins have tried to convince people that the church has done nothing good for society. In their minds, the Inquisition and the Crusades show the true nature of the church. These people believe that history would actually be a better place without the church.       So, what is the church?         The Bible uses many different word pictures to tell us what the church is supposed to be:     * The Body of Christ * The Bride of Christ * The Temple of God * God's Dwelling Place * God's Household          The Biblical view of the church is radically different than the contemporary view of it! The church is the place where God is. The church is the beautiful and spotless bride of Jesus Christ. The church is the body of Christ, continuing the ministry Jesus began almost 2,000 years ago. And, the church is God's household. The church is the family of God. Each of these phrases speaks to the power and the importance of the church. The church is not just a social club - it is Jesus Christ's bride! The church isn't irrelevant - it's the place where the life-giving God dwells! The church isn't a malicious force on this planet - it is the hands and feet of Jesus Christ!         If all these things are true (and they are!), then that means the church is so much more important than many have given her credit for. Indeed, the church is the hope of the world. It's the place where people come to meet God. It's the place where the love of Jesus Christ is dispensed. And, it's the place where the Holy Spirit empowers people to live lives that count. There is nothing else in this whole world like the church.         Perhaps, then, that's why the Bible spends so much time telling us what the church should be. Throughout the course of Scripture, we are reminded of what relationships in the church are supposed to look like. More specifically, we're reminded of our obligation to the other members of the church. Because the church is a family, we have to be committed to it. We have to be committed to one another. The Bible talks about this on multiple occasions:         Romans 12:10: **"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love."**         Romans 12:16: **"Live in harmony with one another."**         Romans 15:7: **"Accept one another."**         I Corinthians 1:10: **"Agree with one another."**         Galatians 5:13: **"Serve one another in love."**         Ephesians 4:32: **"Be kind and compassionate to one another."**         I Thessalonians 5:11: **"Encourage one another and build each other up."**         I Peter 3:8: **"Live in harmony with one another."**         That's only seven of the twenty 'one another' commands found in the New Testament! Obviously, the Bible puts a premium on our relationships with one another. God wants us to be committed to one another. That's because the church is so important. The church is His family. The church is His Bride. The church is His Body. The church is the hope of the world. We need to be sure, then, that we're giving it the priority it deserves. |