

The Church And You

"A CLOSER WALK WITH GOD"

INTRODUCTION

A. FIRST, SOME QUESTIONS TO STIMULATE OUR THINKING...

1. Are you identified with any local group of christians? Are they fully aware that you want to be an accepted, working member of that group?
 2. Do you very well acquainted with the elders, deacons, the classroom teachers and the other members of the congregation where you attend? Would you know who to see if you needed an announcement made, or if you wanted a tape of the lesson?
 3. Do you have a sense of what assets you have to function for the Lord, and are you fulfilling your abilities in the congregation? IF NOT, **is it because no one has asked you to do anything, or because you haven't offered to be involved?**
 4. If every member of the church were as faithfully involved and as active **as you are** in your service to the Lord, what kind of congregation would it be?
- B. In this study we want to make sure we know, personally, WHERE WE ARE in the body of Christ!
1. As we grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and as we continue in our service and walk with God, we do not do so alone.
 2. Being members of His body, the church, is a wonderful blessing we have in Christ, especially as we properly understand:
 - a) What the church is, both in its universal and local senses, and--
 - b) What our personal responsibilities are toward the local church.
 - c) We can THEN better employ this blessing to help us remain faithful in our lives as disciples of Christ by being in the RIGHT PLACE and in the RIGHT RELATIONSHIP with God!

I. WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

A. THE WORD "CHURCH" IN THIS STUDY REFERS TO PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN SAVED...

1. As we are saved, the Lord in heaven Himself "adds" us to His church - **Acts 2:47**
2. As His "church" (a word meaning "assembly" or "congregation"), we are members of God's "household" or "family" - **1 Tim.3:15**

B. THE WORD "CHURCH" IS USED PRIMARILY IN TWO SENSES...

1. **THE UNIVERSAL SENSE:** all those throughout the world who are in a right relationship with God.
 - a) It is used in this way in passages like **Matt.16:18; Eph.5:23; Col.1:18**
 - b) In the "universal" sense:
 - 1) There is only ONE church - **Eph.4:4**; compare this with **Eph.1:22-23**
 - 2) Christ is the head; individual Christians are members of His body - **1 Cor.12:27**- "*Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.*"
 - 3) There is NO EARTHLY ORGANIZATION; what organization there may be is spiritual in nature - **Eph.2:19-20**- "*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,*"
 - 4) The universal church never meets as such; it has no "officers" except Jesus Christ and the original apostles and prophets.
2. **THE LOCAL SENSE:** the saved in one particular locality.
 - a) It is used in this way in passages like **1 Cor.1:2; Rom.16:16; Rev.1:11**- "*saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."*"

b) In the "local" sense:

- 1) There are MANY churches, or CONGREGATIONS - cf. **Gal.1:2**- *“and all the brethren who are with me, to the CHURCHES of Galatia.”*
- 2) There is to be a **scripturally organized** EARTHLY ORGANIZATION within each local congregation of the Lord’s people.
 - i. Ideally, each church has deacons and elders (also known as bishops, pastors) - **Phil.1:1**. (described more fully later in this lesson)
 - ii. But churches may exist temporarily until such men can be appointed - **Acts 14:21-23**- *“And after they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” 23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”*
- 3) Local churches meet regularly; and Christians have responsibilities in connection with their brethren in the local church regarding service and mutual edification.

II. RESPONSIBILITIES IN AND TO THE LOCAL CHURCH

A. WE SHOULD "JOIN OURSELVES" TO A LOCAL CHURCH

1. Only Christ “adds” one to the church UNIVERSAL; but one can and should “join” themselves to a LOCAL church - **Acts 9:26-28**- *“And when he had come to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. 28 And he was with them moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.”*
2. This enables you to benefit by the association of other Christians, and provides you an opportunity to be of service to them - cf. **Heb.3:12-14; 10:24-31**.
3. There are some responsibilities Christ has given you that you cannot fulfill on your own; for example, the Lord's Supper - **Acts 20:7**.
4. So you need to find and join a local faithful congregation of the Lord (a careful study of the New Testament can help you to identify such today; perhaps a subject for future study?)

B. WE SHOULD COOPERATE WITH THE "LEADERS"

1. In a fully developed local church, there will be "ELDERS" to oversee the people of God
 - a) The terms "elder, pastor, bishop, shepherd, overseer" are often used interchangeably, referring to the same position - **Acts 20:17, 28**- [**elders, overseers** to shepherd]; **Tit.1:5-7**- [**elders, overseers**]; **1 Pet.5:1-2**- [**elders**, to **shepherd & feed** the flock].
 - b) Their qualifications are found in **1 Tim.3:1-7; Tit.1:5-9**
 - c) Our responsibilities to them are as follows:
 - 1) To recognize and respect them - **1 Thes.5:12-13**- *“But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.”* **1 Tim.5:17-20**- *“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, “YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,” and “The laborer is worthy of his wages.” 19 Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. 20 Those who*

continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning.”

2) To obey and be submissive when they lead scripturally - **Heb.13:17; 1 Pet.5:2-3-**
“shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; 3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.”

d) Think of them as your "spiritual advisors," as "shepherds;" they are mature, experienced Christian men who are charged by God to **"watch out for your souls"!**

2. In a fully developed local church, there will also be "DEACONS" to serve the people of God

a) These are "servants" who assist the elders in the work of the church

b) Their qualifications are found in **1 Tim.3:8-13.**

c) The work they do is a very noble one - **1 Tim.3:13-** *“For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”*

3. There may also be those who serve as EVANGELISTS and TEACHERS - **Eph.4:11.**

a) The "evangelists" concentrate their attention on teaching the gospel to the lost.

b) "Teachers" concentrate attention upon edifying the members.

c) Those **commonly referred to** as "preachers" or "ministers" may do either/ both the work of evangelist and/ or teacher!

d) But no matter how they serve within the local church, whether as evangelist, teacher, preacher, or minister, **they likewise must submit** to the oversight of the eldership.

C. WE SHOULD CONTRIBUTE REGULARLY TO THE WORK OF THE CHURCH

1. The work of the church might be divided into three different arenas of effort:

a) Evangelism - **Mt 28:19-20; 1 Tim.3:15; 1 Pet.2:9-10.**

b) Edification - **Eph.4:11-16.**

c) Benevolence - **1 Tim.5:16.**

2. How the local church can raise funds to do its work is illustrated in **1 Cor.16:1-2.**

3. Principles governing such collections were discussed recently in our lesson on **Liberality!**

4. The financial support provided to the local church enables it to do much of the work God designed it to do.

D. WE SHOULD DO OUR PART IN TIME & EFFORT REQUIRED TO MAINTAIN THE CHURCH

1. We cannot "pay" to have our part of the church's work done for us.

2. A strong, successful congregation is one where all the membership is involved! **Eph.4:15-16.**

3. There are different kinds of functions we might perform, we just need to be performing!

4. What is essential is that we each do what we can, all with zeal and enthusiasm - **1 Pet.4:11.**

E. WE SHOULD HELP KEEP THE CHURCH UNITED

1. Unity among believers is very important to Jesus - **Jno.17:20-21.**

2. Division is condemned in the Scriptures - **1 Cor.1:10-** *“Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.”*

3. To maintain the unity we have in Christ requires certain attitudes and diligent effort - **Eph.4:1-3.**

4. **Here are some things all of us can do:**

a) Be peacemakers when brethren have disagreements - **Matt.5:9-** *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.”*

b) Avoid gossiping and gossippers! **1 Tim.5:13, 19-** *“And at the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and*

busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention. 19) Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses.”

- c) Avoid discussions of speculative questions that gender strife - **2 Tim.2:23**- *“But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels.”*
- d) Avoid partiality - **1 Tim.5:21**- *“I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of CJ and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality!”*

F. WE SHOULD LIVE THE KIND OF LIFE THAT SPEAKS WELL OF THE CHURCH

1. Be an example to others - **1 Tim.4:12**- *...in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.”* **Tit.2:7**- *“In all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds.”*
 - a) Some enemies of Christ delight to find church members who are not living right in order to use them as models to attack the church and minimize the effectiveness of Christianity
 - b) We are to avoid giving them opportunities to do so - **Tit.2:8**- **[live in such a way]** *“that the opponent may be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us!”* **1 Tim.5:14**- *I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach!”* **1 Pet.2:12**- *“Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.”*
2. Christians are not perfect, but we must always be attempting to be an example of what Christ WANTS/ NEEDS us to be, so that we can be most effective for Him!

CONCLUSION:

1. More could be said on this subject, but this should suffice to make the point that with the blessings of fellowship within the body of Christ come various responsibilities!
2. God did not intend for us to be *“islands unto ourselves,”* but joined together in Christ where we can encourage one another in an atmosphere of righteousness, joy, and peace - **Rom.14:17-19**- *“for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18) For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. 19) So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.”*