



The Local Church (III)

(The Christian's Responsibility To The Local Church)

By Vernon Teagarden

The working relationship of Christians in a given place can be described as the "local" church. Again, we read about a number of local churches in the New Testament (Rev. 2, 3). This pattern is to be followed today, and upon one's obedience to the gospel call, the Lord expects that one find a faithful local church of Christ and become a member of it (Acts 9:26, 27; 11:25, 26). Furthermore, the Lord has given organization and work to the local church, and the local church, as God has designed it, is sufficient to carry out that work. With these things in mind, what is the individual Christian's responsibility to the local church?

First, it is necessary to understand the covenant relationship that exists between brethren in a local congregation. In Romans 12 and verse 5, the apostle Paul says, "So we, being many, are one body in

Christ, and everyone members one of another." The New American Standard Version renders this verse, "So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." The idea is that we, in the body of Christ, are so united as to be mutually dependent. Each is of service to the other. As one paraphrase suggests, "Just as there are many parts to our bodies, so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of it, and it takes every one of us to make it complete, for we each have different work to do. So we belong to each other, and each needs all the others." Being "members one of another" means that we have responsibilities to one another as well as to the Lord! Paul said, "For brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." (Gal. 5:13).

Nowhere is this principle better exemplified and an understanding of it needed than in the local church. Local churches are those brought together by common faith and determination to work as a

The Southeast

Church of Christ meets at:

35 Walnut Court

Mogadore, OH 44260

Phone: 330.628.7432

SERVICES:

Sunday

Bible Study: 10:00 am

Worship: 10:50 am

6:00 pm

Wednesday

Bible Study: 7:30 pm

team. A local church is a distinct entity. It is not a single saint as can be seen by a close examination of 1 Timothy 5:16. In this passage Paul makes a distinction between individual and collective responsibility. "If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed." Furthermore, the local church is not simply a plurality of saints engaged in some activity as can be

seen in Matthew 18:17. "And if he shall neglect to hear them (plurality of saints endeavoring to bring him to repentance, vt), tell it to the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen and a publican."

The local church is, however, a group of saints formed by mutual agreement of its members to function together as one in carrying out the Lord's will.

In order for any local congregation to exist it takes the exercising of the will and conduct of all its members. The same is true when one desires to "join" himself to a particular local congregation (Acts 9:26, 27). Once a particular group of Christians has been formed, that group is to function together as one in specific activities. Read 1 Corinthians 5:4; 16:3, and Philippians 4:15. Therefore, a local church is a "team" of Christians who have united to work as one in carrying out the Lord's will concerning the work that God has given it to do. This is emphasized throughout the New Testament. For example, Paul told the Philippians, "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ; that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Phil.

1:27). "Striving" is an athletic term meaning "striving in concert" (Lightfoot); "striving together as in an athletic contest" (Robertson). Wuest says, "'Striving' is the translation of a Greek word used of an athletic contest. We get our words 'athlete' and 'athletics' from it.'" Therefore, a local church is to, as Wuest goes on to say, "work together in a perfect co-ordination just like a team of Greek athletes." However, can athletes work together except they be agreed? Amos says they cannot (Amos 3:3).

It is in this sense that brethren enter a covenant relationship with one another. By "covenant" I mean a bond, agreement, pact, or contract. When I become a member of a local congregation, I am "agreeing" to do my part in making the work of the local church a success by fulfilling my God-given responsibilities. A failure to think covenant relationship in this way may account for a number of problems local churches face. For example, "church-hopping," or the laxity of attendance to the services on the part of some.

Furthermore, membership in one body means that every member has a personal interest in and responsibility for the work of the body, the healthy growth of the body, the

unity of the body, the purity of the body, and the reputation of the body. Read Ephesians 4:16; 4:3; 5:27; and Philippians 2:15. Responsibility to the body is not a matter of private choice. Why? God "hath set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him" (1 Cor. 12:18).

Any worthwhile, beneficial relationship involves responsibility. Think about our responsibilities in view of the many benefits and blessings that come from being part of a faithful local church. Benefits such as, encouragement to do right (Heb. 10:24); friendship, companionship (Rom. 8:17); knowledge gained from others (1 Cor. 14:3); benevolent help when we are in physical need (1 Tim. 5:16); prayers offered for us (Eph. 6:18); comfort in sorrow, help in troubled times, and assistance in difficulty (1 Thess. 4:18; 5:11).

Problems occur when we fail to realize that we are "members one of another." Let each one of us who have "mutually agreed to work together" take seriously the covenant we have made with our brethren. May we do our very best in meeting our obligations to the local church of which we are a member.

(Next, "The Ideal Member")