A CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSIBILITY TO THE CHURCH
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Every Christian is a member of the church of Christ. The Lord makes him so when he is saved (Acts 2:47). There are certain logical conclusions that are obvious from a consideration of that fact. Let us notice in this article two of those logical conclusions.

First, If the Lord puts the saved into His church, then all persons who have membership in other churches have that membership without the authority of the Lord. There is not one word in all the Bible that authorizes the existence of even one of the many man-made denominations in the world today (I Corinthians 1:10-13). The New Testament describes only one church (Matthew 16:18). That description is easy to understand. If a person is saved (as God defines salvation), then that person is a member of that one church I Corinthians 12:13). If he has then put himself into another church, he is in sin. He needs to come out of the false church in order to be pleasing to God and maintain his salvation.

Description of a Church Member

Let us seriously consider a second logical conclusion of the fact that Christ has put the saved into His one church. The Lord does not put a saved person into a box to keep him safe until he is needed again. He puts the saved into the church, which is His body (Ephesians 1:22-23). This body is a living organism with Christ at the head (Ephesians 5:23), and it is the only religious body of which He is the Savior. A living body has many and various members (I Corinthians 12:12) and each of these members has a specific function and value to the body (Ephesians 4:16). So it is with the church of Jesus Christ. Every person whom Christ has put into His church has a responsibility.

The first responsibility of Christian is to identify himself with a local assembly of the church. As Peter told the elders to "shepherd the flock of God which is among you" (1 Peter 5:2), so we understand that each church is independent of others. As elders have authority only in one church, so every Christian has membership only in one church. There are no "universal Christians," as some call themselves, but simply "Christians" who are recognized as such in the local church where they are members. Paul always associated himself with a local assembly of Christians, as when he came from Damascus to Jerusalem (Acts 9:26), when he went to Antioch (Acts 13:1-3), when he came into Ephesus (Acts 19:8-10), etc. A Christian must not separate himself from the church, but must make his presence known.

In the local assembly of the church the Christian doesn't just have his name on a list of members, but he participates in the work of that church. Christians must be reminded "to be ready unto every good work" (Titus 3:1). As the church grows only as every member does his part of the work (Ephesians 4:16), then every member who does not participate in the work of the church is preventing the growth of the church to that degree in which he could have worked. The Lord admonishes us each to "examine his own work" (Galatians 6:4-5) so that we do not deceive ourselves into thinking that we are faithful when, in fact, we are not.

Every Christian must assist in the preservation of unity, peace, and harmony with in the church. When the apostle Paul wrote to "the church of God which is at Corinth ... with all who in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus" (I Corinthians 1:2), he told them (which includes us), "that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (v. 10). Again he wrote, in chapter 12, verses 24 and 25, "that there should be no schism in the body" and that we must equally "care for one another." It is sad indeed when those who are washed free from sin by the blood of the Son of God put their own selfish interests before the needs of others. Such selfishness, jealousy and lack of true love for one another is the cause of most of the division in the world, and these will cause division also in the church.

"Avoid them that cause division among you," Paul wrote in Romans 16:17-18. We will notice them by their turning from the truth of God's word (I Timothy 4:1-3; 6:3-4). For this reason we must always "preach the word" (II Timothy 4:1-4) and should "not receive" those who teach different doctrines which praise men and not God (II John 9-11). Christians must always be "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:1-3). Those who do not, are not fulfilling their responsibility as Christians.

Preserving and maintaining the purity of the church is the business of every Christian. Jesus died to make the church pure (Ephesians 5:25-27). We certainly must live to maintain that purity (Philippians 1:27). Everyone who calls himself a Christian must separate himself from sin (II Timothy 2:19-22). The church is pure only to the degree that each member of it is pure, therefore each Christian has a responsibility to all other Christians (I Corinthians 5:6), to Christ (II Corinthians 5:15; I Thessalonians 5:10), and to the world (II Corinthians 1:12).

The mission of the church is to preach the gospel to the whole world (Matthew 28:18-20). Does your manner of life contribute to the success of that mission (Romans 7:4)? Are you fulfilling your responsibility in the church of Him who died to save your eternal soul (John 15:2, 8)?

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