

Back to the Basics

The Role of the Members of the Church

Memory Verse:
Romans 12:4-5

Membership in a Local Church

When a person becomes a Christian, a child of God, the scriptures teach that he has a responsibility to work with a local group of Christians, or a local church. In lesson seven, *The Work of the Local Church*, under the section of *Organization*, we showed that every local church is to be made up of members. To show this point, we used the example of Paul. After his conversion, when Paul went to Jerusalem, he “*tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.*” (Acts 9:26, NKJV) The Greek word translated as “join” is *kollao*. *Kollao* means, “1) to glue, to glue together, cement, fasten together 2) to join or fasten firmly together 3) to join one’s self to, cleave to.” (Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon) Paul was trying to join or fasten himself firmly with the church in Jerusalem. He wanted to work with them. After Barnabas spoke on Paul’s behalf, the Jerusalem church accepted him as a member. How do we know this? Consider Acts 9:28-29: “*So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, . . .*” (NKJV) Paul worked as a member of the church in Jerusalem.

There are other Bible passages which show a responsibility on the part of a Christian to be a working member of a local church. Consider 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. While the context is addressing the use of spiritual gifts, there is a great lesson to learn regarding the attitude of the individual member. Take the time to read 1 Corinthians 12:14-18 and 19-22.

As is evident, the Lord views every member to be an important part of the local church. One member is not to be considered any more important than another member. Money is not a separator. Ability is not a separator. Race and intelligence do not separator the members. All members bear the responsibility of doing their part in the work of the local church.

There is another passage which drives home the thought of the local church being comprised of working members. Read Romans 12:3-9 where Paul reminded the brethren in Rome that the body has many members. The scriptures are clear on the fact that a Christian bears the responsibility of being a working member of a local church. This was the case with Paul as a member of the church in Jerusalem, as well as with the churches in Corinth and in Rome. All Christians should follow the example set by Paul, and join themselves with those of like precious faith in the workings of the local church.

Being a Member of the Local Church

Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:15, *“but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”* (NKJV) Since this local church bears the responsibility of being the “pillar and ground of the truth,” each member bears a responsibility to be a working part of this “pillar and ground of the truth.” No matter how insignificant you may view your part, your part and responsibility is just as important as the next member.

This “pillar and ground of the truth” cannot afford any “weak” spots. To help keep this pillar strong, here is what each member should do:

- Q Each member should live as a child of light. (Ephesians 5:8-10) In the process of walking as children of light, we must have no “fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.” Instead, we should expose them through our righteous living. (Ephesians 5:11-14)

When we walk as children of light, our light will shine before men. (Matthew 5:14-16) You are to walk as children of light, letting your light shine before the world. There are times when you will be the only “Bible” that the world will read.

- Q Each member should tell other people about Jesus Christ. What good are parts of the pillar and ground of the truth if they tell no one about Jesus Christ?

- Q Members of the local church must allow the life of Jesus to be manifested in their lives. Paul wrote, *“always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.”*

(2 Corinthians 4:10, NKJV) When we live righteously, always making the right decisions, always doing the will of the Lord, then the life of Jesus will be manifested or made known within our lives.

Being a member of the local church means that you have responsibilities which you must fulfill in order for the local church to function properly. In Ephesians 4:16, Paul talked about the church (“the whole body”) being *“joined and knit together by what every joint supplies according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”* (NKJV) This growth cannot happen unless “every joint” (the members) supplies its part.

What is My Part?

- ü *Some men lead singing. Everyone is to sing.*
- ü *Some men lead prayers. Everyone is to pray.*
- ü *Some men “serve” the Lord’s Supper. Everyone is to partake of the Lord’s Supper.*
- ü *Some are to teach. All are to receive teaching.*
- ü *Clean the meeting place.*
- ü *Prepare the Lord’s Supper.*
- ü *Bring visitors.*
- ü *Attend the extra Bible studies.*
- ü *Attend the regularly scheduled services.*
- ü *Edify others.*
- ü *Be edified.*

A fact that every member must realize is that all the members do not necessarily do the same thing at all times. In Romans 12:4-5, Paul wrote, *“For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”* (NKJV) There are different ways in which different members fulfill their various parts in the work of the local church. See the chart on the previous page, *What is My Part?*

Being a member of the local church means that you are to support the assembling of the saints. One might think that getting Christians to attend the worship services and Bible classes would be a relatively easy task. Sadly, too many Christians believe that Sunday morning attendance is all they have to do as members. Their conscience would probably feel better if the local church only assembled one time a week. However, how often a local church meets is up to the leadership of that local congregation. There must be a worship service on the first day of the week in order to fulfill certain commands. However, any other worship service or Bible study is strictly a matter of expediency.

Does this fact mean that Sunday evening services, mid-week services, and gospel meetings are optional for the local members. Most certainly not. Anytime the saints assemble together, all saints must do their best to be present. Consider carefully Hebrews 10:24-25. The primary command for the local members is to *“consider one another in order to stir up love and good works.”* How is this *“stirring”* up love and good works to be accomplished? It is to be accomplished through the avenue of assembling with the saints. It is difficult to stir one another up to love and good works while being absent from each other. To obey this command, we must be in each other’s presence. We are in each other’s presence when we assemble together.

Just as there are Christians today who do not consider all the assemblies of the local church necessary, there were saints during the first century who apparently felt the same. Look again at Hebrews 10:24-25. The writer referred to those who were forsaking the assembling of the saints. He wrote, *“. . . not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, . . .”*. Apparently, it was the manner of some to forsake the assembling of the saints. The statement, *“not forsaking the assembling,”* was a direct command. Likewise today, Christians are not to forsake the assembling of themselves together.

My Part in the Worship Services

When you assemble with other Christians, you admonish others through the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. (Colossians 3:16) By your presence and participation, you will also provoke other Christians unto love and good works. You will exhort them week after week. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

When you assemble with the saints on the first day of the week, you share with other Christians in remembering the Lord’s death on the cross of Calvary. In Paul’s record of Christ instituting of the Lord’s Supper, Jesus said regarding the bread, *“do this in remembrance of Me.”* Again, regarding the fruit of the vine, Jesus said, *“This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”* (1 Corinthians 11:24,25) When we partake of the Lord’s supper, we not only do it in remembrance of Christ, but we also proclaim His death. Continuing in the same chapter, Paul

wrote, “*For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.*” (1 Corinthians 11:26, NKJV) (Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-30 to see the full consequences of not discerning the Lord’s body when partaking of the Lord’s supper.)

When you assemble with fellow Christians, you join in songs of praises to our Heavenly Father. Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, “*speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,*” (Ephesians 5:19-20) Knowing the purpose of the songs which we sing, it is ever so crucial that the songs be scriptural, that is they teach what the Bible teaches. In addition, each member must sing and make melody in their heart to the Lord. Hence, we must pay attention to what we sing, and mean what we sing.

When you assemble with other Christians, you share in the hearing of God’s holy word. In Acts 2:42, we read, “*And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*” (NKJV) The word “they” referred to Christians. These Christians continued in the apostle’s doctrine and fellowship. That is to say, they listened to and abided by those things taught by the apostles. Going on to Acts 20:7, we find, “*Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.*” (NKJV) On one particular instance when the disciples in Troas came together on the first day of the week to partake of the Lord’s supper (“break bread”), Paul “*spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.*” The purpose of Paul speaking his message was to teach the brethren. Paul was simply doing what he had told Timothy to do. (1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 2:2; 4:2) In order for the brethren to benefit from the message, they must listen and they must study. The Bereans did this very thing. (cf. Acts 17:10-12)

When you assemble with the saints, you join others in praying to God. While a single man may be leading the prayer, it is still your responsibility to pray to God. You may echo the prayer leader’s prayer within your mind or use that time to say your own prayer. The point is to pray. Paul gave Timothy instructions regarding who was to lead the prayers and what type of prayers they were to offer. (1 Timothy 2:1-3,8)

When you assemble with fellow Christians on the first day of the week, you share in the responsibility to give back to the Lord. This giving back to the Lord is to help the local church fulfill its collective work. Your contribution, no matter how great or small, enables the local church to collectively spread the word of God and to help other Christians who are in need. (ex. 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 1 Corinthians 9:3-14) None of these responsibilities can be fulfilled if members do not participate in the weekly collection.

How Can Members Damage the Local Church?

Just as individuals can help the local church fulfill its work, the individual members can also damage and destroy the local church. (When members of the church work in ways which destroys the local church, then Satan’s deceptive devices have worked. Satan is walking around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, including local churches. See Ephesians 6:11 and 1 Peter 5:8.) One way a member can hurt the local church is by complaining about things that are

irrelevant. If you have a legitimate complaint, then be willing to either offer a solution or help to be a part of the solution. Too often, some members act as if their role in the local church is that of the complainer and nothing more. This attitude only harms the local church. In Philippians 2:14, Paul wrote, “*Do all things without complaining and disputing, . . .*” (NKJV) The role of the member of the local church is to edify. Paul wrote, “*Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.*” (Romans 14:19, NKJV) Then again, in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, “*Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.*” (NKJV) The Greek words translated as edify in the previous verses are very similar. They are *oikodome* and *oikodomeo* respectively. Both words have the basic meaning of building up or to build. A member’s responsibility is to build up the local church, not tear it down.

Members of a local church can harm the church by not being of the same mind with the other brethren. (1 Corinthians 1:10; cf. Philippians 3:15,16) In matters of doctrine, we must all be united. However, what about areas of expediencies and judgment? Must we strive to be like-minded? Most certainly. If we do not pursue this like-mindedness, then divisions will develop within the church. (cf. Philippians 2:3-4)

Selfishness is another tool used in destroying the local church. When members are selfish, always wanting their own way, they will not consider the well being of the church. This attitude is contrary to the word of God. Paul wrote, “*Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.*” (Romans 12:16; cf. Philippians 2:3-4)

Members of the local church can also cause damage by giving the local church a bad reputation in the eyes of the community. The church is to display the manifold wisdom of God. (Ephesians 3:8-11) When the world looks into the lives of individual members of the body of Christ, they should see righteousness and obedience. If the world sees sinful behavior within our lives, we will have then damaged the reputation of the local church. If this is the case, then those who behold the local church will not see God’s manifold wisdom.

Hypocritical behavior and inconsistency can also harm the local church. A person is hypocritical when he expects others to serve in ways he is unwilling. A person is hypocritical when he judges others by a standard by which he is unwilling to live. According to Jesus, the end of the hypocrite will be a place where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 24:51)

Members can cause damage by setting a bad example for the weaker Christians, the babes in Christ, and the children. If we set a bad example which others follow, then we will be guilty of leading them to sin. Consider carefully the words of Jesus when He said, “*It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.*” (Luke 17:1-2, NKJV)

Lastly, members can damage the local church by leavening the whole lump (congregation). Unfaithful Christians can cause the local church to become unfaithful. Consider Paul’s warning against the church in Corinth as recorded in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8. When the church allows members to live sinfully, the sinful influence will spread throughout the whole church. At this point, the local church has become guilty of sin and is in danger of being rejected by the Lord. (cf. Revelation 2:4-5)

Ten Questions

1. After his conversion, what did Paul try to do in Jerusalem? _____
2. Who wrote, “For I say, through the grace given me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, . . .”? _____
3. “For you were once _____, but now you are _____ in the Lord. Walk as children of _____.”
4. What are Christians supposed to let shine before all men? _____
5. What did Paul say was “joined and knit together by what every joint supplies . . .”? _____

6. What is the primary command in Hebrews 10:24-25? _____

7. Other than the preacher, what are the members supposed to do during the sermon? _____

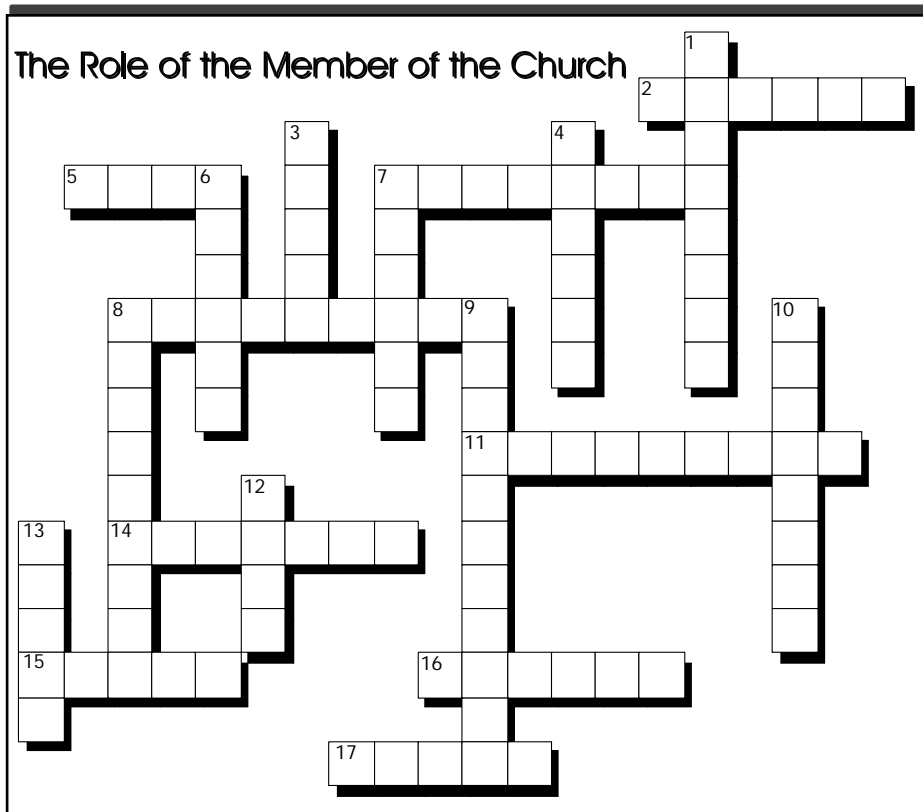
8. During the prayer, which of the members are supposed to be praying? _____
9. Why do we take up a collection? _____
10. List one way members can harm the church. _____

True or False

1. T or F : Peter spoke for Paul when Paul tried to join himself to the church in Jerusalem.
2. T or F : When men see your good works, they may glorify your Father in heaven.
3. T or F : Christians are to carry about in their bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus.
4. T or F : Paul wrote, “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members have the same function.”
5. T or F : Christians are to be admonished through singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.
6. T or F : Through the Lord’s supper, the church is to proclaim the Lord’s death.
7. T or F : Hypocritical behavior will not hurt the local church.
8. T or F : Selfishness among the members can hurt the local church.
9. T or F : It is crucial that the members be of the same mind.
10. T or F : When members have a bad reputation, the church will have a bad reputation.

A Little Fun

(Use the lesson text to answer these questions.)



Across

2. This Greek word means "1) to glue, to glue together, cement, . . ."
5. This man tried to join himself to the disciples in Jerusalem.
7. In Acts 20:7, we read that Paul continued his message until _____.
8. ". . . that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no _____ among you, . . ." (NKJV)
11. ". . . not _____ the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, . . ."
14. To whom did Paul write, ". . . I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, . . ."?
15. Christians are to "walk as children of _____."
16. "For the body is not one _____, but many."
17. "On the _____ day of the week let each one of you lay something aside . . ." (NKJV)

Down

1. In the first century, the Christians "continued steadfastly in the apostle's _____ and fellowship."
3. Christians admonish each other through psalms, _____, and spiritual songs.
4. The church is to be the "_____ and ground of the truth."
6. "Know ye not that a little _____ leaveneth the whole lump?" (KJV)
7. ". . . singing, and making _____ in your heart to the Lord, . . ."
8. "Do all things without complaining and _____, . . ." (NKJV)
9. This is another tool used in destroying the local church.
10. This man spoke on Paul's behalf to the church in Jerusalem.
12. "For as we have many members in one _____, but all the members do not have the same function."
13. A member's responsibility is to _____ up the local church, not tear it down.

Passages in this Lesson

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