

# ***The Christian's Responsibility to the Local Church (1)***

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Many who have not closely studied their Bibles mistakenly think that the exercise of Christianity can be divorced completely from participation in a local church. People may be quick to acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God and He died for their sins, but many are reluctant to become part of a local church and fully engage in the collective work and worship which God has stipulated. They balk at the idea of duty and obligation. The prevailing attitude is, "I will serve Jesus just as long as He doesn't ask me to do too much."

This is a "Christian at-large" philosophy. It recognizes no larger unit than the individual and considers local church membership as merely an option.

But even a cursory reading of the New Testament will reveal that Christians in certain locales were considered a "church" which had a peculiar identity of its own. Thus we read of *"all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons"* (Phil 1:1); *"the church of God which is at Corinth"* (1 Cor 1:2); *"the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Th 1:1); *"the churches of Christ greet you"* (Rom 16:16).

These local churches were not loose associations without structured authority. Christians didn't participate in these groups according to whim and fancy – as one might view his or her membership in a civic or social club. Those in a local church were expected to submit to the oversight of the elders (Heb 13:17). They were subject to withdrawal or excommunication if they persisted in sin (1 Cor 5:2, 4-5, 11, 13). They were to support their brethren who were in material need (Ac 4:32-35). They were not to forsake assembling with other saints (Heb 10:25). In short, many responsibilities enjoined upon the Christian by God are discharged in the setting of the local church.

Our society's loose attitude toward authority has crept into the religious realm. It is astounding how many "Christian" people get up in arms when the church of which they are a member takes a stand on something which they dislike or puts pressure on them to change their behavior. They have come to see the church as their servant rather than vice-versa.

In other articles to follow, we will look more closely at the responsibilities of membership in the local church.