

The Christian's Responsibility to the Local Church (6)

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In the eyes of the world, the Hueytown church of Christ is just another religious group. Our building, though attractive, is rather puny compared with the Methodist, Baptist and Assembly of God complexes. The cars in our parking lot look like the cars in their lots; the people standing outside and visiting after worship look the same as those milling about at other churches.

Many people won't take the time to discover any distinctive features of the Hueytown church. Oh, they will probably know that we don't use a piano and that we believe baptism is essential to salvation, but they won't know why. We will be written off by many as peculiar or fanatical.

Because the world will make such superficial judgments, Christians must pay particular attention to how their behavior reflects upon society's perception of the church. People don't need more reasons than they already have to avoid us or question our integrity. Christianity as a whole has been given a black eye by the unscrupulous few: greedy televangelists, offensive Jehovah's Witnesses and whackos like David Koresh.

Further, as society moves further away from the moral standards of the Bible, the Lord's church will be more isolated and made to look like extremists.

When a Christian then engages in questionable or sinful behavior that becomes public knowledge, the moral force of the church will be weakened in the eyes of the world. One person's behavior can have a very damaging influence upon the reputation of the church. I have had someone say to me, "Do you preach where so-and-so goes to church? Well, I would never go to a church that he attends." This was said because the brother in question had engaged in questionable business practices and was known around town as an ill-tempered and spiteful person.

Christians have a responsibility to keep the reputation of the church above reproach. It is one thing to do what is right and have the world criticize; it is another thing to behave badly and have the world cry, "Hypocrite!"

Our pure lives will encourage some in the world to listen to our teaching, and it will keep others from having a closed mind because of hypocrisy.