

# MY RESPONSIBILITY TO THE LOCAL CONGREGATION

by Robert Hatfield

The New Testament church was comprised of locally-formed congregations in various places where Christians lived. Christians worked together within these local congregations to accomplish the work of the church (cf. the church at Jerusalem [Acts 5:11], the church at Corinth [1 Cor. 1:2], and the seven churches in Asia [Rev. 1:4, 11]). It is vital to the work of the Lord for Christians to associate themselves with (that is, place membership at) a particular local congregation.

What responsibilities do Christians have to the local congregation? Let's go to the Bible.

**Submit to the structured system of church government.** Elders are to be appointed at every congregation (where there are qualified men) to oversee the work of that local congregation (Acts 14:23). The elders are responsible for feeding the flock of God "which is among you" (1 Pet. 5:2); therefore, each congregation is autonomous. There is no such thing as "THE elder" who rules over all congregations. God has structured the church so that each member submits to the authority of the eldership. "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves ..." (Heb. 13:17). The work of the elders is a monumental responsibility for which they will give an account on judgment day (Heb. 13:17)! As long as the elders continually submit to the authority of Jesus Christ, God expects Christians to submit to the elders. Deacons are appointed to be responsible for coordinating specific works (cf. 1 Tim. 3:8-13; Phil. 1:1). Many believe the account in Acts 6:1-6 to refer to the work of deacons. It is worthy to note that the deacons are not the elders; they work under the elders' oversight. The majority of the congregation is made up of members, of course. Each member is important and brings various talents and abilities to the congregation (cf. 1 Cor. 12:14-20).

**Get involved in the work!** It is the work of the *church*! It is not the work of the elders, deacons and preachers to accomplish by themselves. That "victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" only comes if Christians are "stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:57-58). If you are interested in being a part (or being *more* of a part) of the congregation's collective work for the Lord, then let one of the elders know of your desire! Do not be afraid to challenge yourself and try things that you have not done before. The church is involved in evangelism (Acts 1:8), edification (Eph. 4:16; 1 Thes. 5:11) and benevolence (Gal. 6:10), and there is plenty of work for all to do!

**Assemble together for Bible study and for worship on the first day of the week.** The New Testament church did (Acts 20:7). Each committed individual who truly loves God will want to assemble with God's people for the purpose of worshipping Him. The elders provide the congregation with opportunities to study the Bible together. Most congregations assemble for Bible study on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings. Members who submit to the authority of the eldership (as God desires) will be sure to attend Bible classes as well as worship to God.

**Pray with and for the church.** The church, both locally and worldwide, needs our prayers. The Lord admonished His disciples to pray for more workers (Matt. 9:38). "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thes. 5:17). The church at Rome was to "continue instant in prayer" (Rom. 12:12). The New Testament records several instances in which the first century church prayed (Acts 2:41-42; 4:24-31; 12:5, etc.).

**Commit yourself to Christ and to His Work!** If you love Him then you will keep His commandments (John 14:15). If you love Him then you will love the church for which He died (Acts 20:28). If you love the church then you will be faithful and urgent in carrying out the work of the church (Matt. 9:35-38). And if you love the church then you will be dedicated to serving in every possible capacity in the local congregation. Remember Galatians 6:9! It is important to remember that Christians represent Christ, the church of Christ and the church that meets at a specific locale. That is something worth remembering and taking with you where ever you go!

The local congregation is God's plan for His people to accomplish the work of the church worldwide, and Christians have a specific responsibility to the local congregation. Let us not take lightly this enormous responsibility.

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