



The Voice Of Truth

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Common Courtesy

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When an individual Christian seeks to join himself to a local church, as a member, he or she should understand the great blessings and the great responsibilities of that membership. There are blessings in the sense that he will have a place where he can regularly assemble with godly people. He will be able to study with them, sing with them, pray with them, and surely these activities are a great benefit and encouragement to that member. He has a group of people who will help bear his burdens, who will weep with him as he weeps and will rejoice with him as he rejoices. They will watch for his soul and correct him when he is wrong and forgive him when he repents. Indeed there are great blessings to be gained by being a part of a local church.

This membership also comes with great responsibility. By being a member of a local congregation one is agreeing to support the work of that group. This is done in a number of ways: 1) He supports it by his faithful attendance. Hebrews 10:25 says, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much more as we see that day approaching." 2) He supports the local work by being an edifying force in the church and not one who is destructive. The preceding

verse in Hebrews 10 says that we are to, "stir up one another into love and good works." (v24) In I Corinthians 14:26 it says, "Let all things be done for edification." That is each member is to supply his part to build up and to strengthen the church. 3) He supports the work by humbling submitting to the rule of the elders who are given the responsibility as overseers to the local congregation. Hebrews 13:17 says, "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch for your souls as those who must give account. The elders have a difficult task, and one that is God given. The faithful members must do their part to make their work as easy as possible. 4) He supports the local work by regularly and consistently contributing financially. We are given the instruction in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come." Certainly all of an individual's personal duties as a Christian are not satisfied simply because he gives money every Sunday, but it is a vital part of that church's work.

Many more areas of responsibility could be mentioned, but let us consider one more. Does a member of a congregation have any responsibility when he leaves a local church to attend elsewhere, and furthermore, does the new congregation have any responsibility? People often ask me, is there a proper way to leave a congregation? First let me say, that there are times when Christians may need to make a change in their life as it pertains to where are worshipping. Preachers often complain when members of the local church where they are preaching leave to go elsewhere. Those same preachers often make changes themselves moving from one location to another. They answer any challenges to that move by saying, "Well, we felt like we could be more help in that area", or that, "We have done all the good that we can do there, so it was time to move on." Certainly all of those are legitimate reasons, but cannot any member have the same motive? We are not talking about members who just jump around avoiding the truth, but conscientious Christians who may need a change or who may have a personal problem with the way something is handled and do not want to cause any further problems. And furthermore, generally speaking, those same preachers don't complain when someone new is coming to the congregation of which he is a part. But back to our original question, "Does a member have a responsibility when he leaves a church or is there a right way to leave a congregation"? I think certainly the answer is "yes" and my short answer to that question would be that at the least we need to use common courtesy. For example, I don't believe that one should just get upset about something and leave without informing the elders or members of that group that he is leaving. After all, would we leave a job or any other association that way? Even in the workforce we generally give a notice to our employer that we will be leaving. Does not the local church, your brothers and sisters in Christ deserve the same courtesy? I think they do. I don't know of a specific passage that we can turn to and say that this is the proper

formula for leaving and for accepting new members." But we notice that when Apollos left Ephesus the brethren wrote letters to the other disciples where he was going to receive him. What I believe that shows is not only a duty to the congregation that Apollos left, but a responsibility to those who may receive him to have some understanding of his spiritual circumstances. In other words, I believe that it is not a good practice for a church just to accept people into fellowship without at least a discussion of where they are from, the circumstances of that departure, and where they stand with God. I've noticed that here at Market Street when prospective members come and want to be a part of our fellowship that the elders generally consult with those individuals and make an effort to make sure there is no lingering sin that needs to be addressed from the place they have left. And I've also noticed that those who are genuinely seeking to serve the Lord have no problem being questioned about their situation. I think it is a good practice and that we have examples in the scripture of that kind of arrangement. We at Market Street love all our members, those who have been here for many, many years and those who are relatively new. May we all continue to enjoy the great blessings of fellowship and may we all meet our responsibilities as members.