

# WHAT DO I OWE THE LOCAL CHURCH?

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When Jesus taught what we commonly call the "sermon on the mount", he commanded that we put the kingdom of God first in our lives (Matt. 6:33). We know from a study of the New Testament that the kingdom of God is the church of Christ. This is the church:

- (1) That makes known the manifold wisdom of God to the principalities and powers in heavenly places (Eph. 3:10).
- (2) That was purchased with the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28).
- (3) To which God adds the saved (Acts 2:47).
- (4) That is the one body of Christ (Eph. 1:22,23; 4:4).
- (5) Of which Jesus is the Savior (Eph. 5:23).
- (6) Which was the eternal purpose of God (Eph. 3:11).
- (7) Which will be delivered to the Father one day by the Son (1 Cor. 15:24).
- (8) Which is organized into local congregations on the earth (Acts 20:17--Paul called for the elders of the church at Ephesus; Phil. 1:1--bishops and deacons)
- (9) Whose elders watch for the souls of the local congregation (Heb. 13:17).
- (10) Which is composed of many members being yet but one body (1 Cor. 12:20).

With all these Scriptures in our minds, let's ask the question, "*What do I owe the local church?*" There has arisen a teaching that says there is no such thing as a "local church". This factious teaching ridicules the idea of elders as the rulers of the local church even in the face of abundant Bible evidence:

- (1) Acts 20:28---"overseers"
- (2) I Thes. 5:12--"and are over you"
- (3) Heb. 13:17--"obey them that have the rule over you"
- (4) I Pet. 5:2--"taking the oversight thereof"

Many other passages could be cited that teach by implication that elders are the rulers of "local churches", bearing in mind when we use the word "churches" we mean congregations of the Lord's people and we are **IN NO WAY** referring to denominations (which are products of men and are not the products of God!). Since there is authorization for "local churches" and for "elders" as rulers, then logically there is authorization for "members of local churches" and it would just as logically follow that we as members owe the "local church" something! Since Jesus purchased it with his blood, he felt he owed it his life. Can we sit back and say we owe it nothing? Any intelligent person can see that it is faulty reasoning from an ungrateful heart that would believe such! What are some things we owe the local church?

- (1) **We owe it a good influence.** Jesus likens our influence to that of salt and light (Matt. 5:13-16). Salt purifies and preserves that by which it is contacted. Light dispels darkness and always makes a difference. So as Christians we should be like salt and light and we owe it to the local church to use our influence for good. Why do we owe it? Because of the people --

- NO! We owe it because the church belongs to Christ!!
- (2) **We owe it our loyalty.** One of the missions of the church is to edify its members (encourage them). I should have the local church utmost in my mind. The Hebrew writer penned these words, *and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together...* (Heb. 10:24-25a). We owe each other to be here for one another. We need to be present at **EVERY ASSEMBLY** unless we are sick or an emergency arises. We need to be loyal to our home congregation and plan trips, etc. around its services. Some people plan any and everything not ever once considering the members of the local congregation. We also need to **ON TIME FOR SERVICES!!** We disrupt each other when we come in late. How do we think Jesus views those who wander in any 'ole good time they please for services?? What if Jesus had the same perception of his mission (dying for mankind) as many do of their attendance? Where would he have gone that day? Yes, we owe the local church our loyalty!!
  - (3) **We owe it our financial support.** The church has financial obligations whether or not I am present. It depends upon each member to give as he hath been prospered! Because God knew money would be needed for the work of the church, he commanded us to lay by in store upon the first day of the week (I Cor. 16:1-2). Brethren, God's portion must be taken out of our money **FIRST!!!!** Of course, we all have bills, but that doesn't mean we are to provide for our comfort and **THEN** give to God. Remember what Jesus said, "seek ye first the kingdom"? Can a person making \$200-400 per week think God will be pleased with a \$10 bill on Sunday morning having just spent \$20-30 the night before for recreation? What does that say for our attitude toward God? We owe the Father of mankind first place in our giving! We owe it to the local church to give generously. We are wrong when we hold back our contribution because we are mad at someone in the congregation. We are wrong to send the gift to another congregation when we are upset with someone at home. We need to resolve our matters and **THEN** give to the Lord (Matt. 5:22ff).
  - (4) **We owe it our support of its leadership.** When men are qualified to lead and are expediting what the Bible says, we are obligated to follow their rule. Not only are we obligated, but we should conduct ourselves so we do not bring grief upon the rulers, lest it be unprofitable for us (Heb. 13:17). When we reject elders in the church (qualified) we are rejecting God!!! Yes, we owe it our support of its leadership.

We owe this to the local church because it is the Lord's body. May we ever search the Bible to see if this is true and then obey it!

Some thoughts taken from Billy Bland and B.B. James' articles.