

What I Owe My Congregation

I am certain that most Christians realize that service to God is a must. Jesus said in Matthew 16:24, "*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*" Hopefully, every child of God will realize that they are under a solemn obligation of service to the absolute extent of their ability. Read the account of Jesus' conversation with Peter in John 21:15-18. Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him three times, and when Peter replied, "Yes," Jesus commanded Peter to serve Him. When tempted by the devil in Matthew 4:10, Jesus said to him, "*Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*"

I am also certain that most Christians realize why they are members of the church. Acts 2:41, 47 teach us that salvation and membership in the Lord's church go hand in hand. The same action that saves us from sin also grants us membership in the Lord's body. This is not coincidental. We are people that have been saved by the blood of the Lamb (Isaiah 1:18; Revelation 7:14) and we are a people that have been called to a body that God has planned since the beginning of the world (Ephesians 1:3-4; 3:8-10).

This "*salvation*" and "*calling*" uniquely prepares us for a work which God has in mind. Since most Christians know these facts, it seems to almost be irrelevant to study them again. However, I sometimes wonder if we know how to merge these two realities; that is, do we know our specific duties to our congregation? If God meant for us to be members of a local body as is shown in the New Testament (Acts 9:32; 26:10; Romans 1:7; 15:25-26; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 14:33; 16:1; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2, 4; Hebrews 13:24), do we have any specific responsibilities to that body?

I believe that the very use of the word "*body*" indicates that we have a distinctive relationship and a distinctive duty to one another. Paul taught us in 1 Corinthians 12:18-20, 27 that we are "*the body of Christ, and members in particular.*" He also taught that no one member is more important than another. We are all crucial to the work of a local body. No one person can accomplish the tasks that God has set forth, just like no one member of my physical body can perform all the tasks necessary to get me through a day. I cannot dial a telephone with my ear or wash my hair with my foot. Without different members in my body, I am useless. The same is true with the church. With this in mind, let us investigate what we owe our congregations.

My Good Example

A Christian should want their congregation to radiate a wholesome moral and spiritual influence in the community. Therefore, I owe it the example of a good life. I am the light and the salt of the earth and if I lose that influence, I am worthless (Matthew 5:13-16). Peter wrote, "*Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation*" (1 Peter 2:12). Paul told Titus to "... *live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world*" (2:12). This means staying away from everything that is specifically mentioned as sinful (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Timothy 1:8; Revelation 21:8; etc.) and fleeing everything that is questionable (1 Thessalonians 5:22; 1 Timothy 6:11).

My Greatest Concern

If you went to a congregation that broke into little huddles after services and only a couple of people spoke to you, would you go back? A Christian should want visitors who enter the door of the building to feel at home, to learn to love them and to return to learn more of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are our guests. I must make them feel welcome! I owe it to them and to the congregation to show myself friendly. I cannot stand back and wait for other members to greet them, I must take the initiative (Galatians 6:10; Hebrews 13:2). It does not take a Solomon to figure out that people will only go where they are wanted. Why do you scratch your head and wonder why people will not return to your congregation if no one has been friendly, if no one has shown no genuine appreciation for them being there?

My Time, Energy And Talents

No congregation can make progress without faithful and efficient leadership. To a certain extent, the members of a church make or break their elders. In order to make my elders stronger and more efficient, I must give them my support. Many congregations of the Lord's people do not have qualified men to serve as elders, but they still have leadership. As long as these men remain true and faithful to the word of God, I must not hinder and embarrass them in their work (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Timothy 3:1; 5:17). I know there is a strong desire to say, "I could have done it better ...," but how about trying, "May I make a suggestion?" Let us support those who are trying to guide the congregation, not criticize them.

My Financial Assistance

A congregation has financial obligations which must be taken care of at regular intervals. Whether I give or not, the obligations must be paid. If it is fair for my congregation to pay its obligations each week, it is fair for me to give each week. Remember, this is a commandment from God (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). Though circumstances may force me to be absent at times, my contribution still needs to be given to the treasury of the church. It is my duty of faithful stewardship to financially help with the work of our local congregation (1 Corinthians 4:1-2; 1 Peter 4:10). Giving is a very practical measurement of my spiritual priorities. I cannot be greedy and withhold the blessings that God Himself has given me and expect to please Him.

My Faithful Attendance

I know that the very existence of any congregation depends upon the attendance of its members. In fact, attendance is the life of the church! For this reason, I must attend the services -- ALL the services I can. Psalm 122:1 says, *"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord."* How glad are you to come and worship with God's people? I could not live with myself if I knew that my congregation died because I would not attend the services (Hebrews 10:25). Many of us are content to be "Sunday morning" Christians. How can I possibly convince God that my relationship with Him is the most important one in my life if I will not even attend all the services (Acts 2:42)? How can I make God believe that I love Him if I will not gather with His saints at every possible chance?

My Zeal For Converting Souls

I want my congregation to grow and multiply in number. Therefore, I must set myself to the task of converting people to Christ. I can do this by teaching and persuading I can do this by persistent effort! I can do this by bringing and inviting people to our services. Proverbs 11:30 says, *"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise."* Jesus said in Matthew 28:19, *"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you ..."* Too many Christians give up after one try or decide that they are "not any good with people." If there is one area where Christians have a terrible deficiency, it is in talking to people about the gospel. If I never express a desire for my neighbor to be saved, they will probably never obey the gospel. We must show people that we love them and want them to be saved (Romans 10:1). In order to reverse the trend of non-growth in my congregation, I must be more diligent in spreading the gospel.

My Undying Love

My congregation cannot thrive in a frigid atmosphere. I must not allow the church by my carelessness to become a place where hearts are chilled. I must make it a place where hearts are warmed. Therefore, I owe it my heart and the warmth of my love (Galatians 5:13). When Jesus was teaching about discipleship, He emphasized the need for love. He said in John 15:12, "*This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.*" My congregation will never flourish in an environment fed by jealousy, gossip and hate. It will only grow by love. Furthermore, I must also love the truth (Psalm 119:97). To help guide my congregation, I must make the truth the focus of my undying love. This means that I will correct error when I see and I will encourage my brethren to "*ask for the old paths ... and walk therein*" (Jeremiah 6:16).

Wishing to be an honest man, I must meet my obligations to the best of my ability. I must, with the help that God gives, play my part in the incomparable work of building up the body of Christ which He purchased with His own blood (Ephesians 4:12; Acts 20:28). If I am not willing to help my congregation become "*fitly joined together*" in love (Ephesians 4:16), I am not worthy to wear the name "Christian."

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