

# What Does It Mean To Be A Christian?

A Christian Is A Member Of The Body Of Christ



Discovering God's Word

Bible Study Series

# A Christian Is A Member Of The Body Of Christ

Learn what it means for the Christian to be a member of the "universal" church and the "local" church

Watch the free video or listen to the audio of this study @ [www.godsaidso.com/dgw105](http://www.godsaidso.com/dgw105)

## Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

**Study Number:** DGW105

Written by Eric Krieg

**About the author:** My name is Eric Krieg. I am a disciple of Jesus, a Bible student, a truth seeker, and an evangelist. My interest is in using the Bible as my only guide in my faith. My desire is to help others understand the message of the Bible and pursue true, New Testament Christianity.

**Copyright:** Copyright © 2018 GodSaidSo Press. Please use this material to God's glory and honor. Feel free to copy and distribute this material in any way that will bring God glory and help souls to be saved. However, you may not take any of the material out of context or change the material in any way. Please provide the author with the proper credit for the material.

**Scripture quotations:** Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

**My plea:** It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

**FIND MORE FROM THE DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES @  
WWW.GODSAIDSO.COM**

## What Does It Mean To Be A Christian?

# A Christian Is A Member Of The Body Of Christ

What does it mean to be a Christian? Being a Christian means a great deal. Fortunately, God has given us all the information we need to know about what being a Christian really means. As we study His saving message, we discover that a Christian is a member of the body of Christ, which is the church (see Colossians 1:18).

## *A Member Of Christ's "Universal" Church*

---

As a Christian, you are a member of Christ's one body (His church). But, what exactly does it mean to be a member of this church for which Jesus Christ died in order to establish? Let's evaluate.

### What is Christ's "universal" church?

First, please understand that the term "universal church" appears nowhere in the Bible. So, why do we use it? The term is simply an accommodative term that differentiates between the one *church* Christ promised to build (the universal church) and the many *churches* of Christ (referred to in the local sense). Again, while the term "universal

church" does not appear in the Bible, the concept certainly does!

Whenever the word "church" is used in this "universal" sense, it refers to the collection/congregation of the saved. Jesus used the word in this sense in Matthew 16:18: "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." Notice that the term "church" is singular. Jesus was only establishing one church. He only has one assembly/congregation of the saved – only one church! There is only one body (Ephesians 4:4). He does *not* have many separate organizations/collections of people! So, whenever the word "church" is used in this "universal" sense, it refers to Christ's one congregation of saved people (all of the saved who have ever lived). Acts 2:47 also demonstrates that it was those who were being saved who were added to this church.

Now, it is important to understand that Christ's "universal" church does *not* have an earthly organizational structure (it's only organizational structure is that Jesus Christ is the Head of the church, see Colossians 1:18). The "universal" church also does not have a collective work whereby all of the churches cooperate with one another and use collective funds to accomplish a central work. Finally, the "universal" church does not assemble together for worship (or any purpose) at any time or place on this earth. These three areas are all functions that relate to the "local" church (as we'll discuss later).

### Why be a member of Christ's church

Why is it even important to be a member of this universal church? First, you need to be a member of this church because the church is composed of the saved. Those who are not saved are not part of this church. Therefore, if you are not part of this church, you are not in a saved condition. Those who are part of Christ's church will forever live with the Lord in Heaven; but those who are not part of His church will experience the eternal punishment of Hell (Revelation 20:15).

Second, you need to be a member of this church because there is only one true church. Christ

only promised to build one church (Matthew 16:18) – and only one church was built (Acts 2:41, 47)! Therefore, Paul said that there is only “one body” (Ephesians 4:4). There is no other body that contains those who are saved other than the church of Christ. Acts 4:12 says, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” There is salvation in no other church besides in the church that belongs to Jesus Christ!

## How you joined Christ’s church

How did you become part of Christ’s church (His collection of the saved)? You did this by becoming a Christian. Notice how individuals were added to the universal church in Acts 2. Specifically notice verses 37-42: “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.’ And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation.’ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Verse 47 says, “praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

This passage comes in the context of Peter and the other apostles preaching the gospel on the Day of Pentecost (after Jesus had ascended to Heaven). Verse 37 records the response of the people to the preaching, asking “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Then, after Peter had given them instructions to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins, he continued preaching to them and about 3,000 people were obedient to the instructions. Particularly note, then, that these individuals were added to “the church.” So, it is upon obedience to God’s commandments involved in becoming a Christian that an individual is added to

Christ’s church (i.e. the “universal church) – and counted among the saved!

Therefore, whenever you were obedient to the “steps” God has required you to take to be forgiven of your sins and be saved, you were added to Christ’s one “universal” church (body of the saved). You need to understand, then, what God had commanded you to do in order to become a Christian and be added to His church.

### (1) You needed to hear the word of God.

Romans 10:17 says, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Hearing God’s word is a necessary step before you are capable of believing or obeying it. For instance, Acts 18:8 says that the Corinthians first heard God’s word, then they believed and were baptized.

(2) **You needed to believe.** Listen to Jesus’ words in John 8:24: “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” Believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is necessary for salvation and is a prerequisite to baptism (see Acts 8:37). However, “faith only” is not sufficient for salvation or entrance into Jesus’ church. James 2:24 plainly says, “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (see also Matthew 7:21-23).

### (3) You needed to repent of your sins.

When Paul was preaching to idolaters in Athens, he said that God “now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). Also, repentance was identified as being necessary whenever Peter was preaching to the Jews in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:38. Repentance is a change in mind regarding past sins – and a determination to make the necessary changes to live for the Lord.

### (4) You needed to confess Jesus Christ.

Notice the language of Romans 10:9-10: “that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” A good example of this confession is seen in Acts 8:37, just prior to the baptism of the man of Ethiopia: “Then Philip said [to the man of Ethiopia], ‘If you believe with all your

heart, you may [be baptized].’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’” So, this is not a confession of sin. Rather, it is a confession of the Lord Jesus Christ (see also Matthew 10:32-33).

**(5) You needed to be baptized.** Specifically, the baptism that God requires of people today is the baptism (immersion) in water for the forgiveness of sins. This is the baptism that the man of Ethiopia was baptized with in Acts 8:38-39: “So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.” According to the Scriptures, this baptism is necessary to “be saved” (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:20-21), to be forgiven of your sins (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16), and to come into Christ (Galatians 3:26-27).

Specifically, the Bible teaches that it is at this point that an individual is added to Christ’s church. Again, this is what we saw in Acts 2:37-47. The approximately 3,000 who were obedient to the instructions to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins were added to the church. In fact, the Scriptures teach us that we are baptized into one body. Consider 1 Corinthians 12:12-13: “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” As we obey the instructions of God’s Holy Spirit (who revealed the things written in the Bible), we comply with the command to be baptized – and enter Jesus’ body (church)! Galatians 3:26-27 demonstrates the same point: “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Therefore, baptism (immersion in water) is the specific point at which we are forgiven of our sins and added to Jesus’ church.

Then, you are expected to remain faithful to Jesus throughout your earthly life. Jesus instructed Christians to be “faithful until death” in order to receive the “crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). If you fail to remain faithful to God, you will lose your

salvation. Galatians 5:4 records Paul’s comments to the Galatian Christians who had “become estranged from Christ” and “fallen from grace.” John 15:2 makes reference to the unfruitful branch (the fruitless disciple of Christ) being taken away. Verse 6 says that the branch that does not abide in Christ is “cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.” Therefore, if you fall away from God after becoming a Christian, you must again seek His forgiveness (through repentance, confession, and prayer, see Acts 8:22 and 1 John 1:9).

If you have not done these things, you are not part of Christ’s church – because you have not been forgiven of your sins and are not counted among His saved people! Not if you have faith (see James 2:14-26). Not if you profess allegiance to Jesus Christ (see Matthew 7:21-23). Not if you have had water sprinkled or poured on your head (see Romans 6:3-4). Not if you have done anything other than what God has commanded! And, not even if you have done what God has commanded for the wrong reasons! For instance, some are baptized after they believed they were saved. Or, some are baptized into the churches of men rather than being baptized into Jesus’ church. However, this is all done for the wrong reasons!

## **Responsibilities of membership**

What does it mean to be part of the universal church that belongs to Jesus Christ? What responsibilities does membership in this church have? Remember that there is no earthly world-wide oversight of the universal church (Christ is the only Head of the universal church). Therefore, your responsibility as part of the universal church is to be faithful to Jesus Christ.

Revelation 2:10 summarizes this responsibility: “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” Jesus expects His followers to faithfully endure through all of the trials, temptations, and persecutions of life. He expects His followers to

possess the character that is approved of God (i.e. Colossians 3:12-17). He expects His followers to be laboring for Him (1 Corinthians 15:58). He expects His followers to be living holy lives (1 Peter 1:15-16). He expects His followers to be doers of God's word in all areas of their lives (James 1:22), including obeying His commandments concerning their Christian brothers and sisters.

## ***A Member Of A "Local" Church Of Christ***

---

As a member of Christ's one body (church), you should also be encouraged to join yourself to a "local" church of Christ (one that is dedicated to following the pattern God has revealed for local churches in the pages of the Scriptures). But, what exactly does it mean to be a member of a local church of Christ? Let's evaluate.

### **What is a "local" church of Christ?**

First, please understand that the term "local church" appears nowhere in the Bible. So, why do we use it? Again, the term is simply an accommodative term that differentiates between the one *church* Christ promised to build (the universal church) and the many *churches* of Christ (referred to in the local sense). And, while the term "local church" does not appear in the Bible, the concept certainly does!

Whenever the word "church" is used in this "local" sense, it refers to an assembly/congregation of Christians who have joined themselves together in a local geographic area (i.e. Rome, Thessalonica, Ephesus, Colossae, etc.). While there is only one church (in the "universal" sense), the Bible does refer to many different churches (i.e. the church in Corinth, the churches of Galatia, the church in Philippi, etc.). These different churches are simply local churches (not different denominations)!

Furthermore, local churches exist for a purpose – according to the Lord's design! God has provided a blueprint for this local assembly that is given in the New Testament. He has provided a

blueprint regarding the organizational structure, work, and worship of the local church. Unlike the "universal" church, the "local" church does have a God-given earthly organizational structure, a God-given work to accomplish, and a God-authorized assembly for worship.

### **Why be a member of a local church**

I do not read any passage in the Bible that makes *local* church membership necessary for salvation. If it was, you would not be able to be in a saved condition until you joined yourself to a local church. Furthermore, there are a number of times in which individuals become Christians (and members of Christ's universal church); but, there are no local churches of Christ in their communities practicing the things instructed by the New Testament. For instance, what about the man of Ethiopia in Acts 8? Verse 39 says that he went on his way rejoicing after he became a Christian. However, it mentions nothing about this man joining a local church. There may or may not have been a local church in Ethiopia for him to join at that time.

That said, the approved example throughout the New Testament is for individuals who become Christians to join themselves to other Christians in their local geographic areas. There is overwhelming evidence to support joining local churches. Notice that every time you read about a local church in the Scriptures, it implies that individual Christians joined themselves together in that way! Certainly, there is wisdom involved in God's plan for local churches – and we should not be quick to determine *not* to join a local church! Consider some reasons why you should be a member of a local church.

**(1) You will help accomplish God's work in your local community.** God's people (the church) is identified as being the pillar and support of truth (1 Timothy 3:15). That is, God's people (the church) hold up the truth of God's word. Therefore, a local church will be responsible for holding up God's word in a local community. The local church in Thessalonica is an excellent example of this (see 1 Thessalonians 1:8). You should attempt to use your talents, abilities, and opportunities to contribute to the work of spreading the gospel and accomplishing all of the God-given work of the local church.

Ephesians 4:11-16 makes it very clear that each member of the body of Christ has something positive to contribute to the overall function of the body. Thus, whenever a local body (church) of Christ has members who are dedicated to doing their parts, the gospel of Christ will be spread, Christians will be strengthened, needs will be met, and glory will be given to God! Furthermore, while we certainly have individual responsibilities, we must not underestimate the good that can be done whenever individuals work together as a team rather than working separately (see Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)!

**(2) You will be assembling with your brethren and worshiping God together.** God is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). While this can and should be done privately, the approved examples in the Scriptures also show that this is to be done collectively as a local church. In fact, each local church has the obligation to assemble together on the first day of the week. These assemblies of the local church are beneficial to everyone who is involved. Along with the worship that is given to God, there is strength that is to be gained from such worship – as you can know that you are not alone in worshiping God! Furthermore, there are some things that you only read about local churches doing whenever they were together. For instance, the Bible only identifies the Lord's Supper and the collection as things that are done when the church has come together (see Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

**(3) You share in edification.** Christians cannot fulfill the instruction to encourage one another daily if they are all alone! Hebrews 3:12-13 warns about the danger of departing from God and about the deceitfulness of sin. So, the passage instructs Christians to offer daily encouragement to one another so that they would not succumb to the daily temptations of life! God has provided a base of fellowship and strength that is greater than the individual Christian – which is the local church! Therefore, as a member of the local church, you will be both encouraging to your brothers and sisters in Christ and you will be receiving encouragement from them. You will be gaining as well as helping to supply the needed strength to overcome the shared obstacles, temptations, and trials of life! Not only

will this come from your interactions with your brethren; but, it will also come through your collective acts of worship and Bible teaching (both publicly and privately)!

**(4) You share in accountability.** There is accountability in a local church. If there are elders in the church, they help watch over the souls of each member (to make sure that the members are living right). However, all of the members in a congregation must share in the responsibility to watch over each other's souls! This is implied in James' instructions in James 5:19-20: "Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins." Each member of a local church should be willing to receive correction from their brethren whenever they sin. Generally speaking, there is a love and concern for the spiritual well-being of each member of the congregation! And, there are even times when this love and concern will make it necessary for a local church to withdraw from an erring brother or sister (see 1 Corinthians 5 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15).

## **How to join a local church**

Please understand that when you are obedient to the gospel's plan of salvation, you are added by God to Christ's universal church (as we discussed previously). However, this does *not* automatically make you a member of a local church! Still, it is important to become a member of a local church (when possible). Now, please consider how an individual actually becomes a member of a local church.

As we look to the Bible for its answer to this question, we should carefully consider the example of Saul. This is the most direct example of an individual attempting to join a local church that is given in the Scriptures. That said, please recognize that any time you read about a local church in the Scriptures, it implies that individuals joined themselves together in that way!

After Saul (later known as Paul) had become a Christian, he attempted to join the disciples in Jerusalem. Acts 9:26 says, "And when Saul had

come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.” Clearly, the disciples were afraid of this man (having known about his past persecutions of Christians) and were skeptical of permitting him to join the local church in Jerusalem. However, Barnabas (in verse 27) took Paul and brought him to the apostles, declaring how Paul had seen the Lord on the road, how the Lord spoke to Paul, and how Paul had preached boldly in Damascus in the name of Jesus.

Now, consider a couple of lessons from this example – and some conclusions based on them. (1) It is an individual decision for a Christian to join himself/herself to the disciples in a particular area (i.e. to a specific local church). Therefore, an individual who becomes a Christian should seek out a local congregation of Christ’s people to join himself/herself to (if possible). Or, he/she may need to attempt to start a local church. Either way, it is the responsibility of the Christian to seek out a local church to associate with. Then, that Christian must let his/her desire to join the congregation be made known to the congregation.

(2) The members of a local church can refuse to allow an individual to join them. Please consider that each local congregation should be diligent in accepting those who wish to join the congregation; yet, they must also be careful as to who is accepted into the congregation. Once again, notice that the church in Jerusalem did not accept Saul into the congregation until *after* Barnabas took him and demonstrated that Saul really was a Christian! This same point can also be demonstrated from Acts 20:28-31. In this text, Paul warned the Ephesian elders about “savage wolves” who would come in among and harm the flock (the local congregation). Therefore, he told them to “watch.” Also consider how 1 Corinthians 5 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15 demonstrate that congregations have the responsibility to withdraw (withhold fellowship) from members who have left the Lord. Quite simply, the test of fellowship for anyone to be a member of a local church is summarized in 1 John 1:5-7. This passage helps us to understand that if two people are each in fellowship with God, then they are in fellowship with one another. Therefore, if someone

is in fellowship with God, they should be permitted to join a local church!

Next, before we consider some responsibilities of local church membership, let’s consider how you should choose a local church to be a member of. (1) Choose a church in or near your community, when possible. This is what we saw with Paul whenever he came to Jerusalem and tried to join himself to the disciples there in Jerusalem. Other examples of local churches would demonstrate the same point – the implication is that the Roman Christians were members of churches in Rome, the Corinthian Christians were part of the church in Corinth, the Jerusalem Christians were members of the church in Jerusalem. There is great benefit to be part of the local church that assembles in or near to your community! (2) Only join a church that is doing what is right. Not all churches believe and practice the right things. There are many local churches (even local “churches of Christ”) that are not following the New Testament pattern (2 Timothy 1:13) and do not do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus (Colossians 3:17). In this case, God does not want you to be in fellowship with them. Ephesians 5:11 says, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.” (3) Sometimes there may not be a faithful congregation of the Lord’s people in your community (or a nearby community). In this case, you will want to try to start a local church that practices only New Testament Christianity.

## **Responsibilities of local church membership**

Clearly, there are great blessings associated with being a member of a local church. Being a member of a local church helps each Christian to stay the course of faithful living throughout his/her lifetime! It is designed to make it more difficult for Christians to drift away from faithfully serving God. However, along with the blessings of local church membership, there is also individual responsibility to the local church. After all, when you joined the local church (to partake of the blessings of membership), you also entered into a sort of covenant relationship with the other members of that local church. All of the members of the local church have entered an



agreement to do their parts in the local church. Briefly consider some of the responsibilities of local church membership.

**(1) Attend the assemblies.** As I have briefly stated already, the local church has the responsibility to assemble together and worship God. For instance, 1 Corinthians 14 makes reference to a time when the whole church in Corinth would come together in one place (verse 23). Also, Acts 20:7 provides an example of the church in Troas assembling together on the first day of the week.

So, as you recognize that the local church is authorized to assemble together to worship God, you need to recognize the value of these assemblies. First, these are opportunities to give God the worship, praise, and glory He deserves. John 4:23-24 says that the Father is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. Now, if the Father is said to be “seeking” true worshipers, don’t you want to be dedicated to worshiping God and take advantage of every opportunity you have to do so? In the public worship assemblies of the local church, God has authorized five acts of worship: Praying (1 Corinthians 14:15; Acts 12:5, 12), singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (1 Corinthians 14:15; Colossians 3:16), teaching/learning God’s word (Acts 20:7), partaking of the Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week to remember Jesus Christ (Acts 20:7), and contributing to the collection on the first day of the week to gather funds for the work God has given the local church to do (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

Second, these assemblies are opportunities to encourage your brethren and be encouraged by them. While you should be worshiping God any time you have the opportunity to do so (even outside the assemblies of the local church), there is great encouragement to be found whenever you come together for worship with your brothers and sisters. In fact, this is one of the reasons God desires the local church to assemble. For instance, 1 Corinthians 14:26 says that all things that are done when the church comes together must be done for “edification.” Each one of the five acts of public worship works to build you up in the faith of the gospel of Christ. And, being with your brethren during these times encourages you that you are not alone as you are trying to serve and worship God.

The Scriptures are clear, then, that members of a local church must not forsake these times when the church assembles together. Consider Hebrews 10:24-25: “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” This passage directly forbids the practice of Christians willfully neglecting to assemble with the local church. In addition, the passage states that you must demonstrate your concern for your brothers and sisters, stirring them up to love and good works. Therefore, it is sinful for you to willfully neglect to assemble with the local church you have joined yourself to – and doing so demonstrates a lack of concern and love for your brothers and sisters in Christ.

**(2) Participate in the assemblies.** Attending the assemblies of the local church is just a start. Attending the assemblies is about as basic as the responsibilities of local church membership come. Yet, you can fail to please God even if you are assembling faithfully (i.e. every time the local church comes together). You can do this, for one, by failing to participate in the assemblies and actually engage in true worship.

Each one of the acts of worship God has authorized the local church to engage in requires participation from each member of the congregation. Therefore, you must realize that you are not engaging in true worship just because you are around others who are! In fact, to worship God in spirit and in truth requires that you be fully engaged in the acts of worship and that you are participating in the appropriate activities.

For instance, when the congregation is led in public prayers, you should be focused on the words of the prayers and make that prayer your own. When the congregation takes up the collection, you should contribute what you are able and focus on the many ways God has blessed you. When the congregation partakes of the Lord’s Supper, you should be reflecting on the meaning of Christ’s sacrifice and take of the unleavened bread and fruit of the vine. When the congregation is engaged in the teaching of God’s word, you should be focused on the things

being taught and make the appropriate applications to your own life. And, when the congregation is singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, you should be singing with your brothers and sisters and focused on the words of the songs.

Take a moment to see that this is all true, by specifically considering the instructions concerning the singing. Ephesians 5:19 instructs, “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” Notice that this is a reciprocal action of singing – in which all of the members are singing to another and to the Lord. They are not sitting by as spectators who listen to a choir or the rest of the congregation. It is not an act of worship that is reserved for the “best” singers. Instead, every member is expected to lift his/her voice to God in song! God expects for you to participate in the activities of worship during the assemblies of the local church.

**(3) Submit to the elders and other members.** As you interact with the other members of the local church, you must recognize your responsibility to submit to the elders of the congregation and to the other members. To “submit” is to yield your desires to the desires of another. The instructions to submit in these areas imply that there will occasionally be differences of opinion (with regard to areas of Christian liberty).

First, you have the responsibility to submit yourself to the elders of the local church. The elders of the local church have been given the responsibility of overseeing the church, watching out for each member of the church and making sure that the things done by the church (collectively) are pleasing to God. Therefore, with regard to their God-given authority, you must submit yourself to them. Consider Hebrews 13:17. “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.” Other responsibilities you have toward the elders of the local church is to know/respect them (1 Thessalonians 5:12), to esteem them very highly in love (1 Thessalonians 5:13), to be at peace with others (1 Thessalonians 5:13), to imitate their godly examples (Hebrews 13:7), and to

be careful in the area of rebuke toward them (1 Timothy 5:1, 19).

Second, not only do you have the responsibility to submit to the elders of the local church, but you have also been given the responsibility of submitting to all your brothers and sisters (in the area of Christian liberty). Consider Ephesians 5:21. Paul wrote, “submitting to one another in the fear of God.” You must dedicate yourself to living peaceably with your brothers and sisters in Christ (Romans 12:18) and pursue unity with them (1 Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:1-6). Sometimes, this means that you will not have things your way and will have to yield yourself to the desires and interests of others.

**(4) Contribute financially.** The local church has a God-given work to accomplish. This is the work of teaching the gospel to the lost, edifying the members of the church, and extending benevolent help to needy Christians. As you consider each one of these works, it will become apparent that there is a financial element to the work of the local church. For instance, how can a local church financially assist a needy Christian brother if it does not have any money?

There is only one way God has authorized the local church to gather funds. That is through a free will offering of its members. Consider 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 day 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.”

God wants every member of the local church to be involved in the work of collecting these funds together. But, how much should you give to support the work of the local church? God has not made any amount mandatory. Under the Old Law, God required that His people tithe. However, the New Testament does not mandate a tithe. Instead, God says that the amount of the collection is to be proportionate to what you are blessed with (as you prosper). So, the amount of your contribution should increase whenever you are blessed with more. You

can also read 2 Corinthians 8-9 for principles related to your participation in this collection.

**(5) Fulfill your “one another” responsibilities.** As a member of the body of Jesus Christ (the church of Christ), you have many brothers and sisters who are also members of His church. Generally speaking, you have responsibilities toward all of your brothers and sisters as you have the ability and opportunity to come into contact with and help them. The Scriptures teach that Christians are members of “one another” (see Romans 12:4-5). Though these responsibilities extend to all your Christian brothers and sisters, I want you to be particularly focused on fulfilling your responsibilities toward your brothers and sisters in the local church.

These are “one another” responsibilities. Consider a few such responsibilities with me. You must serve one another (John 13:14; Galatians 5:13). You must love one another (John 13:35; John 15:12). You must be kindly affectionate toward one another and give preference to one another (Romans 12:10). You must greet one another in a special kind of way (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20). You must bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2). You must bear with one another in love (Ephesians 4:2). You must forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32). You must comfort and edify one another daily (1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:12-13). You must consider one another to provoke one another to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24-25). You must confess your trespasses to one another and pray for one another (James 5:16). You must have compassion for one another, showing tenderness and courtesy (1 Peter 3:8). You must be hospitable to one another (1 Peter 4:9).

Though this is not an exhaustive list of “one another” responsibilities you have toward your brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, you can clearly see that you *do* have responsibilities toward your brethren. Therefore, as a member of a local church, you will need to be devoted to fulfilling your role in the responsibilities. Your brethren need you to fulfill your “one another” responsibilities!

**(6) Do your share.** While there are some other things we could discuss relative to your

responsibilities as a member of a local church, let’s focus on the fact that you must do your share. You see, the local church is not a *thing* that functions regardless of what the people do. Instead, the local church is a group of people who function together to accomplish their collective, God-given purpose. Therefore, a local church will not accomplish anything without the members of that church doing the work they are all capable of doing.

I encourage you to read and consider 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. In this text, the apostle Paul compares the church to a physical body. Like a physical body is made up of many different members, so is the body of Christ (both the universal church and local churches). And, like a physical body, the only way that the body of Christ can fulfill its purpose and function at its maximum capacity is for each individual member to contribute what he/she can contribute – using his/her own abilities and opportunities.

Yes, each member of the body is essential in order for a local church to function at its best and accomplish the most it can possibly accomplish. Therefore, as you consider your role as a member of a local church, you must determine to do your share in accomplishing the God-given purpose and work of the local church. Consider Ephesians 4:16. Paul wrote, “from whom [Christ] the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

## Conclusion

---

As a Christian, you are a member of Christ’s “universal” church (the body/collection of the saved). Then, the Scriptures consistently encourage you to be a member of a local church that is dedicated to following the Bible pattern for local churches. But, are you fulfilling your responsibilities as a member of the body of Jesus Christ? Is there more that you can contribute in order to do your share? There is work for you to be doing as a member of the body of Christ!

# ***Study Questions***

---

What are the responsibilities of local church membership?

## **1. A Member Of Christ's "Universal" Church**

What is Christ's "universal" church?

Why should you be a member of Christ's church?

How did you join Christ's church?

What are the responsibilities of membership?

## **2. A Member Of A "Local" Church Of Christ**

What is a "local" church of Christ?

Why should you be a member of a local church?

How do you join a local church?