

STEP BY STEP
Part Four in a Series of Eight



4. Membership Matters

**BENEFITS AND
RESPONSIBILITIES FOR
THE CHURCH**

'caring for **PEOPLE** for **PEOPLE** matter to God' Romans 5:8

THE CONGREGATION

INTRODUCTION

Every relationship in life involves benefits and responsibilities. Living in an earthly family means that we enjoy certain benefits of care, love and protection. But it also involves responsibilities of care and love also.

Indeed, every worthwhile relationship is a unique blend of benefits and responsibilities. In the last unit we looked at the wonderful blessings and benefits that come from being a member of the church of Christ. Naturally it also involves some responsibilities and this is the subject of this particular study.

ADDED INTO A SPIRITUAL FAMILY

The illustration above of a family is a well-advised one. Just as we were once born into a family by our physical birth, now that Christians have been born again into a spiritual family. God in Heaven is the Christian's Father! Christ Himself is the Christian's elder brother! And Christians are surrounded by brothers and sisters in Christ. These are the Christians spiritual family.

God knew that it would be difficult for Christians to stand alone, and so He has provided them with a family to love, care for and protect them as they begin their new life in Christ.

1. The congregation is the only unit of organization known in the New Testament. Indeed, the organization of the church in the New Testament is an extremely simple one. There is a Head over all the church (**Christ**) and there are local congregations.

We shall be looking at the various roles within congregations later but at the moment we see that each new Christian is added by God to the church and placed in a congregation to give help, guidance and support to their Christian lives. God would no sooner see a baby abandoned on its own than He would see a Christian cast adrift without the help of a local congregation.

THE LOCAL CONGREGATION

2. Even Paul the apostle, in all of his labours as the great apostle to the Gentiles can be seen to be associated with a local congregation in all of his preaching efforts.

Please **read** the following passages: **Acts 9:26-30, Acts 11:19-26, Acts 13:1-3, Acts 14:25-28, Acts 15:35, Acts 18:22**

In **Acts 9** we find Barnabas making sure that the apostle who had once been a persecutor found acceptance as part of the church.

In **Acts 11** we find that Paul is brought in to play a part in the successful work of the church there in Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and regularly taught a large company of people.

In **Acts 13**, Paul is commissioned and sent by the church in Antioch as he went out on his first missionary journey.

In **Acts 14**, we find that Paul on completion of his first missionary journey gathers the church together and makes a report on his work on their behalf of preaching the gospel to the Gentile world.

In **Acts 15**, Paul and Barnabas return to their preaching ministry in Antioch.

In **Acts 18**, at the conclusion of his second missionary journey, he again returns to Antioch to report to the church further. Paul later is to be associated with the church in Ephesus, for having established it; he worked with that congregation for a period of 2 years and 3 months.

The conclusion is inescapable, that God wants us not just to be part of the church universal in some ethereal sense, but a member of a local congregation.

SPIRITUAL LEADERS IN THE CHURCH

CONGREGATIONAL LEADERSHIP

A Christian's purpose of their being placed in a congregation is that they might benefit from the wisdom and leadership of other more mature Christians.

3. Hebrews 13:7 'Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.'

Hebrews 13:17 'Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.'

Spiritual leaders in a congregation are to be honoured by Christians. They are given to Christians by God for their benefit and they have a sacred duty to watch over their souls, providing pastoral care for them, as shepherds caring for the flock.

4. 1 Timothy 5:17-19 'The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For Scripture says, "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages." Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.'

Elders in congregations are to be honoured for their spiritual wisdom and maturity. And Paul comments here that those who labour in preaching and teaching are worthy of financial support in order to promote their labours further.

5. Please Read 1 Peter 5:1-5

Elders are to exercise spiritual leadership, and pastoral care over the flock of God. Others are to respect and follow the guidance of the elders as they lead them in paths of righteousness. This calls for humility and commitment to Christ on behalf of the elders and other members.

CHRISTIANS ARE TO GROW IN THE CHURCH

CONGREGATIONAL PARTICIPATION

Having been placed in this spiritual family with other brothers and sisters, **what does the Scripture say is required of Christians?**

6. Ephesians 2:13 'But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.'

Those who are in Christ have been brought near to God through the blood of Christ. The 'in Christ' people are in the church. It follows that in the church we are brought near to God.

7. Please Read Ephesians 4:11-16

The church is likened to a physical body wherein each part of the body has a relationship to all other parts. As a physical body grows to maturity so also does the spiritual body. We are to grow up spiritually!

Becoming a Christian, the new birth is not an end in itself. It is a beginning. Christians are then to grow up from being the spiritual baby into mature (wo)manhood in Christ. Note how the spiritual growth of each member is said to have a beneficial effect on all others, when each part is working properly then growth throughout the body occurs.

Note the last phrase in our reading! A principal responsibility of every member is the edification (**building up**) of every other member. The church is a mutual help society! Christians find their help in the church. Christians give their help in the church.

8. Galatians 6:10 'Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.'

We note that it is said of Jesus that He went about doing good, **Acts 10:38**.

NO DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH

9. 1 Corinthians 1:10 'I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.'

Christians are commanded to maintain the unity of the Body of Christ. Christians are to be peaceable and at peace with one another that the work of the church be not hindered by fighting amongst us. There are to be no divisions in the church.

10. Please **Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-26**

Spiritual care is to be exercised concerning each other. Paul tells us if one member suffers, then all suffer. And each member is to realise that the functions of other parts of the body are not to be regarded as unimportant or demeaned.

Indeed, the '**lesser**' parts should be accorded the greater honour. This is the spirit of exercising spiritual care and is the kind of thing that is done in all-sound family life.

11. Romans 7:4 'So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.'

Please **Read John 15:1-11**.

Jesus uses the figure of the vine and branches. The purpose of branches is to bear fruit for the vine. A branch that does not bear fruit just draws strength from the plant and does not produce what it was intended to produce.

SPIRITUAL FRUIT NOT RELIGIOUS NUTS

Galatians 5:22-24 'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.'

WHAT KIND OF FRUIT IS THIS?

As Christians are joined to Christ, it is intended that they should bear fruit for Him. The Lord requires spiritual fruit not religious nuts.

Note carefully the **Galatian 5:22-24** passage. It is nothing less than the transformed life.

As God is allowed to work within the Christian He produces fundamental spiritual change. This change encourages other Christians and attracts the world to the power of the Gospel.

CONGREGATIONAL APPLICATIONS

We can see all too clearly the responsibility to grow and to help others to grow, to be changed and to encourage others to change, to follow our spiritual leaders and to lead others to greater faith.

EVALUATION SHEET

Please go ahead and fill in the evaluation sheet attached.

CONTACT DETAILS

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EVALUATION SHEET

Step by Step Lesson 4

(Please type or write your answers within the lines provided)

Name:

Home Address or Email address:

QUESTIONS:

(Please reply with your answers via e-mail or a separate sheet of paper.)

BUT HOW CAN A CHRISTIAN MAKE A CONTRIBUTION TO THIS?

Take a few moments now to think about how a Christian can play a part in this wonderful heavenly process.

If you cannot think of some things to write down now in the space provided below, ask a Christian to help you so that you can begin on this wonderful, godly, spiritual, holy, Christ-like, edification, Scriptural, righteous, Christian plan, to build one another up in the family of God.

MY LIST

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

SENDING YOUR ANSWERS

Once we have received your evaluation sheet we will send you the **next study** in the series.

Please return your completed evaluation sheet as an email attachment to info@the-scriptures.co.uk