
LOYALTY TO THE LOCAL CHURCH

“But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body as it hath pleased him....And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee...”

~I Corinthians 12:18-21.

One of the greatest problems in the life of local churches today is a lack of a deep sense of loyalty on the part of many members. Pastors everywhere affirm that Christians are too often guided by material and personal considerations, and not by any sense of duty and loyalty to their fellowship. It is possible that our criteria for such decisions are out of line with the Lord's? What if He wants our present church commitment to be a dominant priority? The writer knows of a 'pioneer' church where some years ago nine or ten couples committed themselves to establish a witness in a new town destitute of evangelical light. Within three years, all but two couples had moved elsewhere. The reason? They moved to get higher status and more lucrative jobs. These moves were not essential. Apparently, they were the free choice of people who felt no deep loyalty of the local 'body' of Christ in which God had placed them.

What is the local church in our own estimation? Is it merely a company of Christians conveniently gathered together for worship and instruction? Or, is it something special in God's sight? Has God chosen those members...and called those individuals to be committed to each other to serve Him and to live as a unique family? Does God require a special loyalty within the local church? Liberty is the 'in'

word today. For some believers, loyalty to any particular congregation smacks of restriction, legalism... The New Testament is clear in its portrayal of the local church as a company of believers very strongly related together in bonds of love and loyalty. The local church is much greater than a haphazard collection of believers... The local church is the object of His delight, and He is especially protective of it. I Corinthians 12 says, **“Now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.”** God has designed each congregation... We may conclude that if any are removed (other than by the design and overruling of the Lord) some vital quality will be missing. Ephesians 4:16 also describes the organic unity of the congregation. **“The whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth...”** The idea of joints and limbs being freely interchangeable between bodies is unthinkable! Church members are pictured as integral and irremovable parts performing vital functions. The removal of a believer from one church to another should only take place as the clear overruling guidance of God... Some believers are ready to jettison the local church with scarcely a moment's hesitation. Many pastors have felt this keenly, especially those ministering in new towns or inner-city areas into which Christians rarely move, but out of which many move readily...Did the Lord design it this way?

Every (spiritual) local church is His representative body in the world. Whatever

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we do for His representative body, we do for Him and to Him...If I am disloyal to the body, I am disloyal to Him. How can I lightly leave or forsake it? When church members uproot and move as though their place in the body of Christ is of no significance, it is because they have lost respect for the local church as the body of Christ... It is something special to which we owe special love. In times of trial or decision, we need to see what desires are really influencing us... Clearly if all members of inner-city churches followed the natural desire to flee to more pleasant districts there would be no evangelical churches in our most densely populated areas... Where do we find in the Bible that the first rule of guidance is that we are to seek the most congenial and attractive surroundings? It is the worldling who makes his own pleasure and enjoyment his first priority.

Satan is constantly trying to spoil churches by taking believers out of the 'element' in which God has placed them. He is constantly tempting God's people to seek greener pastures elsewhere. What about those new-town young couples referred to at the beginning of this chapter, who walked out on the infant church so easily? How could they do such a thing? Where are the people of loyalty and commitment, sacrifice and courage? One wonders where they are now. Do they enjoy high academic or commercial positions? Are they well established in beautiful homes with fine cars parked in their driveways? What ever has become of them...God remembers. They regarded the appointment of God

lightly and hurt the body of Christ... In seeking guidance, let us recognize that when the Lord sets us in a sound church, it is a divine appointment, and we must honor and respect that with all our strength. We are not free agents!

By Dr. Peter Masters - Pastor Metropolitan Tabernacle, London. Copied from *Baptist Vision* (9/2004).

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But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also *is* Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body *were* an eye, where *were* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *were* the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where *were* the body? But now *are they* many members, yet but one body.

~1 Corinthians 12:11-20

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

~1 Corinthians 12:27

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