

DOES THE LOCAL CHURCH MATTER?

Many respond to the title of this article with the often repeated objection to *organized religion*, “Sure, I believe in God, but I don’t want to be involved with a church.”

We express a qualified sympathy with this sentiment if by “church” and “organized religion” one is referring to the humanly founded denominations so abundant in today’s religious world. Since all of them came along too late to be the church Jesus promised to build per Matthew 16:18, we don’t want to be involved with any of them either.

However, we have seen that the church Jesus promised was a covenant relationship between himself and the individual who follows him. It is accurately described as a spiritual relationship of salvation between God and the individual whom he saves in Christ (Hebrews 12:22-24). With this church we cannot afford to be uninvolved.

It is vital to realize that the terms of this covenant extend beyond one’s initial submission to Christ in being baptized for the remission of sins per Acts 2:36-38. Jesus’ commission to his apostles required them to not only to teach and baptize, but to teach those whom they baptized to “observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:18-20).

Thus, the question before us is, do the terms of this covenant require a Christian to join with fellow Christians in a congregational arrangement? A simple reading of the Bible provides a resounding, **YES**.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, the historical document of the New Testament books, reveals that those who obeyed the gospel as it was declared by the apostles banded together in autonomous local churches to worship God, edify one another and accomplish the collective (congregational) work the Lord required of them.

Notice that those Christians did not organize themselves under any human charter, nor were they required to sign on to any humanly written catechism, creed or discipline. What they did do was guide their lives and direct their work by the apostle’s doctrine (Acts 2:42). It is this same teaching that is documented for us in the New Testament writings (I Corinthians 14:37; I John 1:1-4). If we will follow it, we will be what those people were 2,000 years ago—simply Christians (Acts 11:26), and the local churches we form will be what theirs were—simply churches of Christ (Romans 16:16).

—Jerry F. Bassett

