

What the Local Church Should Ask You

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

- A. Fellowship exists in two capacities: In a general condition of all brethren who share the common faith, and the in the special relationship in a local church.
 - 1. 1John 1: 3, 7; 2John 9; Acts 9:26-28
 - 2. Note that John states that the apostles had fellowship with his readers even though they were not members of the same local church.
 - 3. There is also fellowship within the local church based on participation in spiritual matters and approval of common practices in local work.
 - 4. In determining whether one can be in fellowship with a local church, he should determine whether the church is the Lord's church.
 - 5. Matt. 16:18; 1Cor. 1:2; 2Cor. 3:1-2; Rom. 16:1-2

I. WHAT THE LOCAL CHURCH SHOULD ASK YOU

- A. Where were you last a faithful member?
 - 1. One could have been withdrawn from by another church and need to return to correct matters.
 - 2. One could have been a church divider elsewhere.
 - 3. Could have been an unfaithful member just wanting to start over without facing responsibility to make acknowledgements for it.
 - 4. The local church should not receive into fellowship one that would be disciplined if he were a member of that congregation for the same reasons that they would practice discipline: prevention and purification.
 - 5. Letters of commendation served a purpose in New Testament times.
 - 6. A faithful member would be eager to bring such confirmation with them to a new work - Acts 18:27; 2Cor. 3:1
 - 7. Because it was a New Testament practice, it should be our practice.
- B. What do you expect in a local church?
 - 1. You should want a sound church with which to worship God and to be edified, with opportunities to become an active part of the work, and prospects to participate in edifying others.
- C. What do you expect from a local church?
 - 1. A former Mennonite: "When I became a Christian, I thought churches of Christ would be training grounds for soul winners and broadcasting stations for sound doctrine; instead, I found them to be more like hospitals for Christians with self-inflicted wounds and spas for people who want to be pampered. I am going to return to my father's church."
 - 2. Do you see the church as a gathering of people with whom you worship God, or as a place where you expect to be entertained.
 - 3. Do you look forward to coming to worship, or do you contemplate how often you must put in an appearance to keep your membership?
 - 4. Do you plan to visit those in need, or do you expect to be visited frequently?

5. Do you want Bible classes that challenge you to learn more and think more deeply about the inspired word, or do you prefer to hear the same first principles over and over again?
- D. What is your understanding of fellowship and edification?
1. Are you more comfortable imitating coworkers and classmates in the world, or in following the examples of faithful Christians?
 2. Do you relish the idea of relationships with the other disciples here, or would you prefer to be left alone to do your own thing?
- E. What kind of preaching do you want?
1. 2Tim. 4:2-5; 1Tim. 4:13
- F. Do you plan to follow the leadership of the elders here? - Heb. 13:7, 17
1. In years gone by, elders were viewed as overbearing, inaccessible, and often followed blindly, disrespected and gossiped about for it.
 2. These days they are viewed as unnecessary or deeply flawed, and most congregations prefer to dispense with an eldership in favor of voting in a business meeting.
 3. Do you accept the wisdom of God's way and are you willing to cooperate with it?
- G. Describe your family condition
1. Married, children at home or moved away, occupation, etc. all matters that can influence your role in the congregation and profoundly impacts fellowship.
 2. Not the business of the local church?
 3. Saul of Tarsus was a Christian killer by trade; none of your business, Jerusalem elders?
 4. Simon the Sorcerer was trying to buy the Holy Spirit; none of your business, Peter?
 5. Diotrephes tried to take over a church; none of your business, John?
 6. Apollos was baptizing in the name of John the Baptist; none of your business, Aquila and Priscilla?
 7. Fellowship is the state of having the faith in common. If I do not share the same faith and am unwilling to confirm that we share the same faith in moral family matters, then fellowship does not exist.

Conclusion:

- A. Fellowship in the local church is an important matter often treated lightly.
1. Congregations dwindling in number or losing members to the world are often desperate to increase numbers and keep the doors open.
 2. They occasionally accept into fellowship anyone who says he is a Christian.
 3. In Bible times, a major source of internal corruption was the practice of unconditional fellowship (1Cor. 5).
 4. Just because a person has been baptized does not mean that he is automatically a member of a local church. One does not have the "right" to fellowship.

- B. Both the individual and the local church should be honest and disclose all relevant information. Both need to know exactly what to expect from the other.
 - 1. In the real world, there are occasions when the individual Christian decides he cannot have fellowship with a certain local church. He must sorrowfully depart and seek a faithful assembly.
 - 2. There are occasions when the church must not extend fellowship because of un-repentant sin or an immoral lifestyle. The disciple seeking fellowship should be moved to repent so that fellowship can exist.
 - a. 1John 1:7
 - b. The Adversary is pleased when they instead choose to go to another congregation that accepts their sin unconditionally.