

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 if 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 One could have been withdrawn from by another church and need to return to correct matters.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
 - 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 will be our practice
- B. What do you expect in a local church?
 - 1. You should want a sound church with which to worship God, to be edified, to become an active part of the work and to edify 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 or 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 often 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 at Jerusalem?
 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, or 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.
- 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 cases where the individual Christian decides he cannot have fellowship with a certain local church. They 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

What You Should Ask the Local Church

Introduction:

- A. Not a comprehensive or definitive list of questions; rather, it is a place to begin to determine whether we are in fellowship in the local church
 1. It should be noted and understood that fellowship can be both sinfully withheld or erringly extended
 2. Asking questions can reassure us in our fellowship, it can highlight areas where fellowship can improve, or it can expose reasons why fellowship should not exist
- B. Fellowship is not a right; it is a privilege and blessing that exists when disciples share the same faith and love in Christ
 1. I do not have a right to fellowship in the local church, any more than a local church has a right to demand fellowship from me
 2. Fellowship is not unconditional; if the local church or I do not meet those conditions, fellowship does not or ceases to exist between us

I. WHAT YOU SHOULD ASK THE LOCAL CHURCH

- A. What is the church doing to reach the lost and edify the saved?
 1. The work of the local church is to teach the lost and edify the saved
 - a. 1Tim. 3:15; Eph. 4:11-13, 16; 1Cor. 14:4, 16, 19, 23-24
 2. The question should reveal not only the work in which the church is engaged, but their attitude toward it.
- B. What are some special focuses of the eldership, preacher, and members?
 1. What are the local needs specific to that area or work, and how are they meeting them?
 2. Lots of children require special attention to Bible classes; college town attention to reach students, industrial area service schedule for workers
- C. Does the preacher have a structured, balanced pattern of sermon choice?
 1. Evangelists can become issue-oriented hobbyists, militant church destroyers, mercenary cotton candy peddlers, etc.
 2. Elders can arrange for or tolerate the same
 3. New Testament preachers addressed both contemporary needs and long term edification.
 4. Their preaching was not abstract or informative only, nor was it always on the attack - 1John 4:1-3, 2:3-6, 3:1-3

5. There is a mindset among some of our fellow disciples that believe that a preacher has to address error every time he opens his mouth. "Verse one; here's how the denominations get it wrong; verse two; here's how the liberals get it wrong..."
 6. This eldership emphasizes balanced preaching, and I am endeavoring to reduce your appetite for the sound of cannon fire, and increase it for the sound of harmonious, balanced Bible based preaching
- D. How is the offering used?
1. Used only for authorized work - 1Cor. 9:11-14; 1Tim. 5:16
 2. What amount is being spent for the preaching of the gospel?
- E. Does the church practice discipline?
1. Discipline is both preventive and purifying - 1Thes. 5:14; 2Thes. 3:6
 2. Some local churches have never practiced local church discipline
 3. Churches that do it well seldom have to do it at all
- F. How does the local church practice unity?
1. In the faith, unity, because it is absolute - Eph. 4:2-6; Gal. 6:1-2
 2. In our faith, patience, because it is growing - 1Thes. 5:14
 3. In matters of personal faith, tolerance, because God commanded it
 - a. Rom. 14
- G. What is taught and practiced regarding moral issues: marriage, divorce, and remarriage, abortion, homosexuality, substance abuse, pornography, etc?
1. Rev. 2:12-14
- H. What is the understanding and practice regarding the work of elders?
1. They are not unapproachable dictators - 1Peter 5:3; 1Tim. 5:17
- I. Are plans actively in place to appoint elders and deacons in the future?
1. A local church without scriptural elders is incomplete
 2. Titus 1:5; Phil. 1:1; Acts 14:23
- J. Does the example of the preacher and elders encourage reverence in worship?
1. The way we conduct ourselves in worship is a reflection of our sincerity of heart and the authenticity of our worship. A casual environment usually indicates spiritual indifference, laziness, and is a classic form of passive rebellion.
 2. It means something to God; therefore, it should mean a lot to us
 3. 1Tim. 2:8-9; Mal. 1:11-13

Conclusion:

- A. Fellowship is one of our greatest blessings, but we must always work to keep it so - Psalm 133:1-3