

*ECCLESIOLOGY*  
**THE LOCAL CHURCH**  
Lesson 16

**The Congregation**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

- A. We have concluded that the elders are to rule and to teach in the local church. The pastor-teacher is to study, teach and preach the Bible to the local church. The deacons are to be servants to the people and helpers of the elders.
- B. What about the congregation? What are its duties? Is not the congregation important? The answer to these questions is that the congregation is the most important part of any local church, for the whole government of a local church works to serve God and the people.
- C. God has also given certain commands and mapped out certain duties for the congregation. These responsibilities cannot be taken lightly and they are essential to the proper functioning of any local church.

**II. THE CONGREGATION IS TO SUBMIT TO LEADERSHIP**

- A. The congregation is to be in submission to the elders (Heb. 13:17).
  - 1. The first duty of a local congregation is to submit or yield themselves to the elders, who have the rule over them. The flock must listen to what the elders have to say as long as it is based upon biblical principles or direct commands from scripture. Elders are to base all their authority on the Word of God. A failure of the congregation to yield to God-appointed leadership is sin and this will be dealt with by God in discipline.
  - 2. The congregation must submit because the elders in a local church are constantly watching out for the welfare of their souls. God holds a congregation responsible to submit to leadership and He holds elders responsible to rule well.
  - 3. Every elder will give an account to Christ for how well he ruled a local church. God expects more from those who are placed in positions of leadership and authority. The elders exist to see that the congregation is brought to spiritual maturity. If the people submit, the elders can do their ministry in joy, but if the people resist their authority this brings grief to the elders and makes their task very difficult.
  - 4. It is “unprofitable” or “of no advantage” for the congregation to have a spirit of rebellion to leadership. The flock is the loser if they do not obey the God-appointed leadership over them.
  - 5. Submission in a Christian is a sign that he is filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18-21). A Christian cannot be controlled by the Spirit and rebellious at the same time.

6. The congregation is to submit even if it feels the elders are wrong, because in yielding you are acknowledging God-appointed leadership. God will bless this attitude of submission.
  7. A congregation never has to yield to a pastor or elders if there is doctrinal error or moral deficiency. However, on biblical matters, practical matters and matters of church policy, the flock is to submit.
- B. The congregation is to respect (know) their elders (1 Thess. 5:12).
1. This is a very practical command to the flock in the area of communications. They are to get to know their elders, for in so doing, they will come to understand that the elders really desire to help the congregation grow in spiritual maturity. More problems exist in the life of a local church from lack of communication than from any other reason.
  2. Notice it tells the people to get to know the elders. The flock should make every attempt to get well acquainted with the leadership, for then the people can make their requests known to the leadership of the church.
- C. The congregation is to esteem the elders (1 Thess. 5:13). The flock is to think highly of or respect the elders in a genuine spirit of love. Elders are worthy of this esteem because of their office and the work they are doing among the flock. NOTE: It stands to reason that a congregation cannot esteem and criticize the elders at the same time.
- D. The congregation is to be at peace with the elders (1 Thess. 5:13). There should always be a harmonious relationship elders and the flock. A squabbling church will never go forward for the Lord. NOTE: If you have any complaints or constructive ideas, the elders will be more than happy to hear you out and do what they can about the situation. Elders exist for your spiritual welfare.
- E. The congregation is to remember their elders (Heb. 13:7): The flock is to remember that the elders have been given authority over them by God and they must pray for their leadership that they will make the right spiritual decisions.
- F. The congregation is to follow the example of the elders (Heb. 13:7): The flock is to imitate the lives of the elders. NOTE: A low level of spirituality among the people usually is the result of poor examples set forth by the elders. A congregation will not follow or respect inadequate elders.
- G. Conclusion: Submission is a key word in all of Christianity-submission to Christ, submission to others and submission to elders. One of the biggest problems in all churches, especially independent churches, is a lack of respect and submission to God-appointed authority which is invested in the elders.

### **III. THE CONGREGATION IS TO MAINTAIN THE UNITY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH**

- A. A very important duty of each member of a local church is to maintain the unity of the local church. The unity of the local church must be maintained at all costs, for this is a Biblical teaching (Eph. 4:1-5). Unity is to be kept in a spirit of love. Not every Christian can lead in the local church but every Christian can exercise love.

- B. The local assembly corporately, as well as the individual Christian, has been called into existence to be a testimony to the world. If the world can see a local church that can get along in harmony, they will have to be impressed. The world in the first century of the church would say of Christians, “Behold, how they love one another!” Genuine love is the strongest force in the world.
- C. The unity of a local church must not be academic but an actual reality, for, without unity, God will not fully bless the local church. NOTE: Unity is something that must be worked at diligently. One of the most difficult things to do as a Christian is to learn to get along with other Christians, but it is possible as Christ lives out his life through the Christian (John 13:34-35).
- D. The Devil destroys the work of the local church by division and strife, disrupting the unity of the church. Evangelical churches almost always crumble from within, not from the attacks of the world.

#### **IV. THE CONGREGATION IS TO DO THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY**

- A. The most challenging and demanding duty of the congregation is the ministry itself, for the Bible teaches that Christians are to do the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:11-12). NOTE: The concept of ministering saints must be driven home again and again to Christians until they understand that God has placed upon them the responsibility of the ministry. This concept is clearly taught in the scriptures but it is probably the least practiced in the 20th century.
- B. Eph. 4:11-12 says that God has given gifted men to the church, which includes the pastor-teacher. The pastor-teacher has been given to the church for the “perfecting of the saints,” or “preparing God’s people,” and this should be translated, “equipping of the saints.” The pastor-teacher’s job is to train the congregation in Bible study, doctrine, evangelism, contemporary theology, church history and Christian living. NOTE: The pastor is paid to study, pray and train the saints that the saints might mature in the things of the Lord and do the work of the ministry.
- C. The saints are to be trained that they might do the work of the ministry (reaching the lost) and that they might edify or build up the body of Christ (reaching the saved). NOTE: The congregation should be evangelizing and sharing Christ with people outside of the local church. The people should be teaching Sunday School, visiting the sick, leading home Bible classes, hosting prayer meetings, etc. The people are to be the workers and servants of the Lord.