

## Should Christians Be Members of Human Organizations?

**W**hen a person obeys the gospel, he or she makes a commitment to follow Christ above everything else. Jesus taught: “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:37, NKJV).

This is a serious commitment. It teaches us that we must never allow our job, our interests, our hobbies, our citizenship, or even our families to ever become more important to us than our commitment to the Lord. *Would this principle suggest that it is wrong for Christians to join or be members of any type of organization?*

Christians are by definition, members of a divine organization. The church is an organization that was established by God. It has leadership (Christ is the head: Ephesians 5:23; elders and deacons lead local congregations: 1 Timothy 3:1-13). It has membership (Christ adds those obedient to the gospel to the church: Acts 2:47). As a result, it is not only appropriate for a Christian to be a member of the church but it is part of the very definition of being a Christian to be a part of the Lord's church universally (Hebrews 12:22-23). If a Christian seeks to be faithful to the Lord he or she will also identify with a sound local congregation of the Lord's church (Acts 11:25-26).

By birth, all human beings are placed in another organization: the home. In this organization there is also leadership (husbands are the head of the wife: Ephesians 5:23; the wife is

to manage the house: 1 Timothy 5:14); children are to obey their parents: Ephesians 6:1). When Jesus teaches not to love family “**more than**” Him, He does not call upon Christians to abandon their responsibilities within the family. To the contrary, putting Jesus first in our life demands that we carry out our commitment to our families as Christians should. The husband must lead (1 Peter 3:7; Ephesians 6:4), the wife must submit (1 Peter 3:1), parents must teach (Deuteronomy 4:9), and children must honor their parents (Ephesians 6:2).

Both of these organizations are established, constituted, and governed by God. What about other types of organizations? In the epistle to the Romans, Paul taught, “**Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God**” (Romans 13:1). God does not dictate the particular type of government that rules a nation (i.e. democracy, republic, monarchy, dictatorship, etc.). God does not regulate the structure and functioning of a particular government (i.e. parliament, bicameral legislature, ruling council, etc.). Yet, Paul teaches Christians to submit to the organization of the governing authority of their given nation. Christians are to submit to the leaders themselves as well as the laws they pass (1 Peter 2:13). Only in the instance when the governing authority demands that a Christian disobey God, is a Christian authorized to violate such laws (Acts 5:29). This does not suggest that when government is corrupt, or engaged in wickedness a Christian can defy government by refusing to pay taxes. Jesus taught, “**Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s**” (Mark 12:17).

Christians in the New Testament were not only in submission to their government but they were also members of the governmental

organization of their nation. Erastus was “**the treasurer of the city**” (Romans 16:23). In the Philippian letter, Paul extends greetings from saints within “**Caesar’s household,**” a reference probably to servants rather than family members (Philippians 4:22). Cornelius was a centurion, in charge of 100 Romans soldiers (Acts 10:1-48). Paul himself, acknowledged his Roman citizenship (Acts 22:28) and utilized its benefits (Acts 25:11). This shows us that membership in a governmental organization is not a violation of our commitment to love Christ “**more than**” all other things.

**If Christians are faithful, they honor their heavenly citizenship over any earthly citizenship (Philippians 3:20).**

There are many other types of organizations founded wholly by human beings which Christians may be asked to join. These might include business partnerships, trade organizations, neighborhood associations, clubs, guilds, troops, packs, etc. Biblical parallels to these types of organizations might include the business partnerships which existed between the two families of James & John and Peter & Andrew—they were “**partners**” in the fishing business (Luke 5:10). Paul may have shared a limited partnership with Aquilla and Priscilla—co-workers in the tentmaking trade (Acts 18:2-3). The Bible does not outline terms for such partnerships. *How were the duties divided? How were the funds shared? What regulated their activities?* All of these questions were determined by the human beings involved in the organizations. It seems clear that the issue was not whether a Christian could be a part of such an organization but how a Christian behaved in interaction with others. Notice a few principles that would apply:

- **Treat others as you would yourself** (Matthew 7:12).
- **Look out for the interests of others** (Philippians 2:4).
- **Speak the truth to others** (Zechariah 8:16).
- **Don't set a stumbling-block before others** (Romans 14:13).
- **Don't be presumptuous about the future** (James 4:13-15).
- **Let your "yes" or "no" be binding** (Matthew 5:37).

All of these principles of living in Christ must regulate our behavior in any relationship we have with others in this life.

We have seen that Christians are a part of the divine organization of the Lord's church. We have also seen that Christians maintain responsibilities within the family organization as well as the organization of civil authority. Finally, we have also seen that while Christians may be a part of man-made organizations, their behavior must be regulated by behavior and character that is befitting to a Christian. This might lead someone to ask, *"Does that mean I can join any organization I want?"*

We have seen that in civil authority a Christian must disobey laws that require them to violate God's law. There are some organizations that exist to do wrong! The Law of Moses taught, **"You shall not follow a crowd to do evil"** (Exodus 23:2a). Such organizations would include criminal gangs, but also those kinds of organizations that seek to promote what is sinful. A political group that advocates abortion as a matter of "choice," or pornography and homosexuality as "freedom of expression," is not a proper type of organization for a Christian to join. Isaiah rebuked those who **"call evil good, and good evil"** (Isaiah 5:20). Social clubs that advocate drinking, coarse jesting, or dancing

would be equally inappropriate. Paul taught that the Christian should— **“have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them”** (Ephesians 5:11).

There might be organizations that are wholesome of themselves but make demands upon a Christian’s time commitments that would prohibit being associated with them. *Do I have to miss services because of my membership? Will my time and influence over my family be jeopardized? Will membership keep me from my duties to serve the Lord?* All of these questions need to be asked. If the answer to any of these is “yes,” even though I might have the *right* to join such a group, the compromise of values it would demand means that it would be *wrong* for me to do so. The Holy Spirit warns us, through the pen of Paul— **“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?”** (2 Corinthians 6:14-15).

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