

Can The Church Do What The Individual Does?

Liberal-minded brethren believe that the church can do what the individual does. They say since an individual Christian can build and maintain an orphan home, so can the church. Some also say that the church can give to a college, just like the individual. Their belief is, there is essentially no difference between the church and the individual. The only problem is, the Bible disputes this.

Paul wrote, "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually" (1 Corinthians 12:27). Each part of the body is not the body, but combines with other parts to make up the body (1 Corinthians 12:12-26). Each Christian is a part of the body of Christ, but not the body itself. Locally, each member of the congregation is a part of the congregation, but not the congregation itself. This is well illustrated by the teaching of Jesus.

Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that "by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector (Matthew 18:15-17).

Notice, neither the two brothers involved in the dispute, nor the two or three witnesses, are the church. Therefore, the church and the individual Christian are distinct.

The church is not authorized to do what the individual can do. God has given the church authority in three areas: teaching the lost (1 Thessalonians 1:7-9); edifying itself (Ephesians 4:11-16); and benevolence to saints in need (Acts 11:27-30). Individuals have a broad range of authority, much more than we can list. However, we will look at some.

Like the church, Christians are authorized to teach the lost, edify brethren and give help to saints in need (Acts 8:4; Hebrews 3:13; Matthew 25:34-40). In addition, they are authorized to help their neighbors in need (Galatians 6:10). Christians may also start a business, join civic organizations, give to colleges or entertain friends. The church is not

authorized to be a "Salvation Army," helping non-saints, start a business, become a part of civic organizations, donate to colleges or entertain folks. Also, individuals may participate in a sports league, but the church is not authorized to do so.

Years ago the plea to help "poor starving orphans" was very emotional and persuaded many brethren to ignore Bible authority. Helping the colleges seemed like a good idea as well. After all, they "train" our preachers. The idea of the church doing what the individual could do was appealing. However, with the passing of time, more departures from the faith took place--church softball, plays, schools, etc. Some are now realizing how far adrift they are and do not know what to do about it. The answer is, go back to the Bible.

Steven F. Deaton