

Individual and Collective Action

Bible Authority—III

Introduction

1. Salvation only occurs on an individual basis via a person's individual faith and obedience to the gospel.
2. Though salvation and obedience are individual, God saw fit to organize individual efforts into a collective action for worship and service.
 - a. Individuals are added to the church (Acts 2:47).
 - b. Their collective efforts are brought together in the organization of the local church.
3. The fact that God established a collective organization for the local church necessarily implies a distinction between the work of an individual and the work of the collective body.

Discussion

I. Responsibilities of the Individual

- A. The individual has responsibility in every realm of life.
 1. The community: 1 Pet. 2:12
 2. Business enterprises: Col. 3:22-4:1
 3. The home: 1 Pet. 3:1-7; Eph. 6:1-4
 4. Civil government: Rom. 13:1-8; 1 Pet. 2:13-17
 5. The church: Eph. 4:1-16; 1 Cor. 12:21ff.
- B. The individual is free to pursue any goal so long as the goal and the method are in accordance with righteousness.

II. Distinguishing Between the Collective and the Individual

- A. God organized individual efforts into a collective body—the local church.
 1. Paul was able to say “The churches of Christ greet you” (Rom. 16:16) because there was more than one local congregation.
 2. Where there is more than one Christian in any locale, they are expected to come together and function as a local body.
 3. The organization of the church, as stated in the New Testament, is limited to the local level.
- B. The fact that God chose to organize individuals into a local church implies that He has a purpose for that organization.
 1. If the local church was expected to do the same thing as the individual, then there would have been no need for the local church.
 2. Therefore, the existence of local churches in the New Testament necessarily implies that the church fulfills a role that is different than that of the individual.
- C. In the New Testament, God distinguishes between the work of the individual and the work of the collective.

1. 1 Tim. 5:3-8, 16:
 - a. The collective is to take care of “*widows in deed.*”
 - b. But the individual is to care for his own, that the church may not “*be burdened*” with the individual’s responsibility.
2. 1 Cor. 7:2-7:
 - a. Men and women are to have their own spouses.
 - b. This is a responsibility that a collective body cannot fulfill.
3. 1 Cor. 11:20-22; 33-34
 - a. Social meals are matters of individual privilege and obligation.
 - b. But the collective has no business associating social activities with the work of the church.
 - c. Therefore, Paul said, “*What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?*” and again, “*But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment.*”
 - d. Thus emphasizing individual right, but not collective.

III. The Responsibilities of the Collective

- A. Where God is specific in His commands, we are limited.
- B. God is specific concerning the work of the church.
 1. Evangelism:
 - a. Local: 1 Thess. 1:8
 - b. Foreign: Acts 13:2-3; Phil. 4:16
 2. Worship: John 4:24
 - a. The Lord’s Supper: 1 Cor. 11:22-34
 - b. Collection: 1 Cor. 16:1-2
 - c. Singing (Eph. 5:19), prayer, edification
 3. Edification
 - a. Matt. 28:20
 - b. Eph. 4:11-16
 4. Benevolence of needy saints:
 - a. Acts 11:29
 - b. 2 Cor. 8:4
 - c. 1 Tim. 5:3ff.

Conclusion

1. There is a difference between the work of the individual and the work of the collective.
2. Many churches today do not respect that difference.
3. We must respect the difference if we want to be a New Testament church

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