**Authority of God**

**The Individual and the Church**

Consider, if you will, Bill who owns a shoe store, a home with a lawn and is a member of a local church. On Friday he sells 20 pairs of shoes, on Saturday he trims his hedges and on Sunday he attends the assembly of the saints and participates with his fellow Christians in worship to God. How many of these three activities were works of the local church? Well of course, the obvious answer is one: the assembly in which God was glorified and the members were edified. The fact that Bill is a member of the local church does not make the church the owner and operator of a shoe store. A member of the body of Christ trimming his hedges does not put the church in the lawn-care business. You might say that this principle is so obvious, it is a waste of article space, and you would be right were it not for the fact that some in the church have chosen to cloud the distinction between the individual Christian and the church in an attempt to justify certain unauthorized activities for the local church. Their logic is that the local church may provide social entertainment, contribute to human organizations like colleges and engage in general benevolence because the individual may do those things.

The scriptures don’t provide teaching directly designed to address this issue precisely because such a distortion of sound logic is unreasonable. However, certain scriptures about related subjects offer an indirect but crystal-clear indication that the individual is not the church and that the two entities have been given distinctly different sets of responsibility by God.

1 Timothy 5:16 states “If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed.” The woman in question is a member of the local church, but she is not the local church. Furthermore, she has been given specific responsibilities by God as an individual Christian and the local church has been given distinctly different and separate commands. The individual Christian and the church are considered separate entities by God, and it is simply wrong to maintain that what one does, the other does.

In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus tells us to resolve a conflict with a brother 1) by going to him privately, 2) if he refuses to listen, take one or two more, then finally, 3) tell it to the church if he refuses to listen to two or three. According to Jesus, steps one and two are individual action. The collective assembly is not involved until step three. Jesus knows that there is a distinction between individual and group action and so should we.

In Acts 5:3-4. Ananias and his wife had just lied to the Holy Spirit by selling property, donating part of the proceeds, but saying that they had donated the entire amount of the sale. Peter’s response is enlightening regarding God’s attitude toward property ownership: “But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control?’” When they had the property, it was theirs to do with as they wished. Once they sold the property, the money was theirs to do with as they wished. It only became part of the local church’s common fund when it was donated. The individual’s funds are not the church’s or vice versa.

There is no divine authority for church sponsored entertainment, church support of human institutions or for involving the church in general benevolence. The fact that individuals are at liberty to engage in all three is irrelevant.

**John McKee**