

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

INDIVIDUALS AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

By Michael R. Baggett

I have heard it said many times that the local church can do anything the individual Christian can do. I will not deny the local church can do some of the same works an individual Christian; however, I do not believe it is scriptural to teach and practice that the local church can do everything the individual Christian can do.

Jesus teaches there are some duties assigned to the individual Christian for which the local church is not responsible. For example, in Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus teaches it is the responsibility of an individual Christian to resolve a dispute with his brother alone. At this stage in reconciliation, it would be wrong to involve a third party. According to Jesus, the local church shouldn't even know about it at this stage. If the brother refuses to hear the offended brother, he is to take one or two more people with him as witnesses that the brother will not hear him out and repent. Again, the command calls for one or two brethren to go with the sinned against party. Two or three people do not make up the local church. Finally, if the offending party refuses to hear them, it is to be told to the local congregation where they have local membership. At this stage the local church gets involved in settling the dispute. Note, resolving personal problems with another Christian is an individual duty. The church does not get involved unless individual measures have failed. So, according to Jesus' instructions, should the collective local church do the duty of an individual Christian? It should be clear.

Why would anyone dare say that the local church can “scripturally” do anything the individual Christian can do in the first place? The answer is simple. People want to apply this reasoning to justify the use of their church treasury for whatever they determine. If it were the case that the local church could do anything the individual Christian can do, then money could be taken from the church treasury for any reason an individual might take money from his individual account and spend the money on whatever he wants. This thinking turns the church treasury into a free-for-all-fund! The collections would be used for anything the church elders could call a work!

The account of Ananias and Sapphira, who lied about a certain contribution to Peter, reveals to us a difference in funds donated to the local church and an individual's account. Ananias and his wife sold a certain land and kept back part of the money, all the while agreeing to lie and say they had given all the money (Acts 5:1-3). Now, here is the point I want to make: Peter asked Ananias, **“While it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?”** (Acts 5:4). Before the money was given, the money belonged to the couple. The implication is the money is no longer their own after it is given to the church. It is no longer in their power. Hence, the local church has its own funds and individuals have their own funds. The church doesn't have power over an individual's money, but neither does an individual have power over the money collected for the local church! The money collected from the saints belongs to the local church and now must be used for reasons authorized by the New Testament for the local work. The church treasury is not a free-for-all fund. Pease, read a little further.

Paul, an inspired apostle, gives individual Christians the duty to provide for their families. Most everyone is familiar with the Bible verse, **“But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel”** (1 Tim. 5:8). Would anyone deny that Paul is addressing individuals? If Paul is addressing individuals, and he is, then the individual cannot pass off his personal responsibility to the local church to do his duty to his family! Most of you have heard that “charity starts at home.” Can't you see where that got started? If you will study 1 Timothy 5:3-16, you will see that individuals are responsible for their own relatives and household. One cannot simply throw that duty on the local church. The Bible teaches that every individual will answer for neglecting his own household (1 Tim. 5:8). The local

church is not responsible for supporting every Tom, Dick, and Mary who requests assistance. There are emergency temporary situations, but this is not my main point in this article. The Bible teaches the principle that the local church treasury should not be burdened with just any cause; that, individuals should relieve their own widows, and in principle needy among their own families (1 Tim. 5:16). The Holy Spirit has revealed there are limitations on the use of the local church treasury (1 Tim. 5:3-16).

Extending the principle, the local church cannot and should not do just anything the individual Christian can do. Who is responsible for entertaining the family? The same one who puts food on the table and clothes on the children's backs is the same one who is responsible for providing entertainment in whatever form they think is healthy. Who is responsible for intensive childcare? Well, I think the Bible answers this in 1 Timothy 5:15 and Titus 2:5 and is specific about who is responsible. I'll give you a hint, it is not the local church! We never read of a local church providing childcare in the Bible. Sorry, if this offends anyone, but the local church needs to get back to doing the work of spreading the gospel, edifying the saints, and assisting needy saints when there is a valid need (Acts 13:1ff; Eph. 4:11-12; Rom. 15:25-31; 2 Cor. 8:4). The local church cannot be charged with the duties of the home, no more than it can be charged with keeping the individual unspotted from the world! (Jas. 1:27). ■

WORSHIP PLEASING TO GOD

By Dennis Abernathy

Reverence and sanctity that once characterized worship services in days gone by seems to have come and gone. Today it seems many come to entertain and to be entertained. One preacher even said from the pulpit: *"We are here to entertain God."* Frivolity has become an all too frequent part of many lessons and sermons. People like to be entertained and there are those who are more than willing to oblige. Jesus, in His encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well said: ***"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth"*** (See Jn. 4: 21-24).

True worshippers are those who worship God sincerely, genuinely, and intelligently, as opposed to those who worship mechanically, ceremonially and ritualistically. True worship is rendered ***"in spirit and truth,"*** i. e., sincerely and in harmony with His will. This tells us not all worship is pleasing to God. Thus, it is possible to worship God, and yet not worship in spirit and truth, and thus unacceptably.

To worship God in ***"spirit"*** involves our attitude and our commitment in His service. If our heart is not in the proper frame-of-mind, then we will not be able to worship ***"in spirit."*** Worship is ***"spiritual."*** i.e., it is the sacrifice of a humble, contrite, grateful and adoring spirit. All Christians are priests and, as such, offer up spiritual sacrifices to God who is loved and adored.

Worship is not about the individual, or the physical location; it is not the "where" but "how" to worship that is pleasing to God. The place of worship makes no difference today. One can worship in Paris as well as in Palestine, in Johannesburg as well as in Jerusalem.

To worship God in ***"truth"*** relates to how well worship follows the acceptable pattern revealed in God's Word. One may worship the true God, but still not be in harmony with the truth of His will (READ Matt. 15: 1-9). These worshipped God, but their worship was neither in ***"spirit"*** or in ***"truth."*** In conclusion then, worship must be correct in both ***SPIRIT*** (with the right attitude) and in ***TRUTH*** (according to God's Word). ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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