THE CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIP

The failure to separate what the congregation, as such, can do and what the individual Christian can do in the service of the Lord is the cause of much misunderstanding in the church today.

There are two modern theories advanced; (I) What the Christian individual can do, the church can do; (2) What the church cannot do the Christian individual cannot do.

These two positions represent two extreme views and both are wrong.

Some of the brethren have contended that if the Christian individual can support an old folks home or an orphan home, religious papers etc., then the church can also do out of its treasury. Others have contended that if the church cannot support such, the Christian individual cannot do.

Such misconceptions are based upon the falacy that whatever the Christian does, the church is doing.

It is the purpose of this writing to show that there are many things which the Christian individual must do in his individual relationship in living the Christian life that the church, as such cannot engage in Scripturally.

To be a Christian, it means submission - obedience - conformity to the will of Christ in every relationship in life, in all manner of living, I Peter I:I3-I6; James I:22-27.

It certainly includes being a member of the body of Christ - the church - but it includes more than just church membership.

One cannot be a Christian, a Saved person, without being a member of the church. The Lord adds the saved to the church, Acts 2:47.

The religion of Christ is a way of life embracing every relationship in the life of the Christian individual.

In living a Christian life, we have five different relationships.

(I) The Community (social), I Peter 2:I2; Col. 4:5; I Corinthians I0:3I-33.

(20 Business enterprises (economic), I Thess. 4:II-I2; I Thim. 5:8; Col. 3:22 & 4:I.

(3) The Home (family), I Pet. 3:I-7; Eph. 6:I-4; Colossians 3:I8-2I.

(4) The Government (civil), Romans I3:I-8; I Peter 2:I3-I7.

(5) The Church (spiritual), Ephesians 4:I-I6; Ephesians 3:2I; Ephesians ":I9-22; I Peter 2:5.

It is just as necessary for a Christian to please God and do His will in the home, in the conducting of his business, in his relation to the government, and in his social contacts with his fellowman as it is in the church.

A man who does not live in his home according to the principles of righteousness, who does not conduct his business according thereto, who does not fulfill his duty before God toward the government under which he lives, or who does not treat his fellowman as a Christian should, is not a Christian, no matter how faithful he may be in the work of the church or in its worship.

The Christian life and duty embraces every relationship in life. It is a twenty-four hour day; seven days each week, job, and nothing in the life of the individual Christian is exempt from it.

There are some individual christian duties that cannot be performed by the church.

A Christian is under obligation to make a living for his family. He cannot shun this obligation and put it on the church. I Timothy 5:8-I6.

Christians are obligated to bring up their children in the nuture and admonition of the Lord. While it is certainly right for the church to teach any body, whenever it has the opportunity, the church cannot take over the task of rearing our children for us, Eph. 6:4.

While speaking of things concerning the home, which is a femily relationship, let us notice some of the things.

When I maintain my home and support my family and train my children, what am I doing? Practicing Christianity, but this is not any part of the church.

It is my responsibility to rear my children in the nuture and admonition of the Lord. That is my responsibility, and it does not belong to the church.

We also have the statement in connection with the home, "Husbands, love your wives" Eph. 5:25. It is my responsibility to love my wife above every human being, but I would not want the elders of the church doing! No, that is not the business of the church. If my children need correcting, it is my job to correct them, and if they need spanking, I'll spank them, but it is not the duty of the church to do it, and I would not want the elders trying it.

There is an obligation a christian has as a citizen of the government. He votes, (if he wishes), pays taxes, obeys the laws of the land, etc. What is he doing? He is living the Christian life. That is a part of his Christianity and is a political relationship.

I have a responsibility in society, a social relationship. We certainly do not live unto ourselves, we have a relationship to society, the community in which we live, that we cannot escape. I may contribute resources and talents with those of the community in which I live for the accomplishment of any righteous cause, but that does not mean that the church can take of its treasury and do that.

I can make a contribution to any benevolent work in our community, as long as it is in harmony with rightous principles, encouraging them in what ever they are doing. This I do as a citizen.

We have also the "business or economic enterprise." The Christian individual is to engage in some sort of gainful occupation to provide for himself, and those who have the right to depend upon him, and in order to be

able to give; but the church cannot engage in business or economic enterprises.

I have a responsibility to operate my business honestly, legitimately, and give men their just dues, pressed down, shaken together and running over, full measure.

That is my duty, I am to work with my hands things that are good. I am to study, to be quiet, and to do my own business. Lets say, if I ran a grocery store, I would not want the elders or leaders of the church to tell me when I could open the doors and when I could close them, and what sort of mark-up I could have on my groceries, and what per cent I could charge, and what I aught to stock, and what I aught not to stock.

I just simply would not want them meddling in my affairs in this regard, and you would not either.

The Christian individual has many obligations to his community, to the people with whom he works, among whom he lives, and with whom he associates that is no part of the work of the Lord's church in any sense, Romans I2:I4-2I.

Nowwe would like to consider some things concerning "the church" which is the Spiritual Relationship of the Christian. However, some duties assigned both the Christian individual and the church. In some work the individual Christian is to function both in his individual capacity and as a member of the church (congregation)in doing God's will.

Concerning teaching, in acts II:20 we have an example of individuals planting the word in Antioch and also the "church" in Jerusalem sent out Barnabas to assist in the work of preaching the word, there, Acts II:22-24.

Benevolence is in some instances an individual obligation and in some instances it is chargable to the church, I Tim. 5:I6. But in no instance does the discharge of individual Christian duty conflict with one's duty to God in the church. We should do both to the best of our ability, realizing that we have many duties to discharge as individuals that cannot be performed by the church, as such, and there are duties that must be discharged in the

church that cannot be discharged through any other relationship.

May the church take out of its treasury and support and maintain old folks homes, orphan homes, hospitals, religious papers etc.???

In answer to these questions, let us notice James I:27. This is the passage which is normally introduced by some who think it supports the right of the church to build and maintain orphan homes for the purpose of accomplishing a brotherhood work. "Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is to visit the fatherless and widows in their afflictions, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."

Now, to whom was that passage written? Some people think that it is the authority which the church has to maintain an orpahn home!! And all you have to do is to just look at the context and you will see that it is not.

Let us look at it and you will get that. Backing up to verse 26, it says there that "If any man chaimeth to be religious while he bridleth not his tongue."

Who is the tongue of the church? Does the church have a tongue? It has a good many in it that are sometimes used too freely, but there is not any one person or group that is the voice or tongue of the church, because it has none such.

Therefore, it can be seen that James is talking to someone who has a tongue. Well he tells us in the same verse to whom he is talking. He say, "If any man". He is talking to individuals. If any man thinketh himself to be religious, while he bridleth not his tongue but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain."

Note the verse right after it; "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."

James here is speaking to the individual Christian. It is a Christian responsibility to keep oneself unspotted from the world. Likewise it is the individuals responsibility to "visit the widows and orphans in their needs. To "visit" means more than to say, "How are you feeling today?" It means to help them in any way that you are able to do. Nay, I ask, "Does the church have orphans???; and why not have a home for widows??

Which widows can you care for, and which orphans can you visit? Any that you have the ability to provide for whether in the church or out.

You can help any person that is in need, or is not in need, as an individual Christian, but the church cannot do so. If you think it can, and you respect the authority of the Scriptures, please name the passage that shows that the church ever did take care of anybody but poor Christians.

Let us notice a few passages which shows who the church cared for. 2 Corinthians 9:I, Paul said, "As for touching the ministering to the saints". To who? Saints, saints, saints. Who are the saints? Well, they are the ones who were ministered to. See Romans I5:25-26; "But now I say unto you, I go unto Jerusalem ministering unto the Saints." This contribution was for the poor saints at Jerusalem. Do you suppose that the saints were the only poor people at Jerusalem? Certainly not. If it was used for any others, it was misappropriated. Notice also Acts II:29.

In face of these clear passages, somebody says, "Well, Galatians 6:I0 says, "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially to the houshold of faith", so that gives us the right to do good to all men." Look at your context again and see who is being addressed.

Paul here was speaking to the individual Christian, and his duties. This certainly has an individual application.

A brother said to me one time, that there was no difference between the money in our pocket, and that of the church treasury. I don't know why one would make a statement like that, unless their thinking is fuzzy.

The money that we have in our pocket, we can do with it as we please, that is ours, but after we contribute of our means to the collection of the church, I then no more have a say concerning it, for it has forever lost its identity with the rest of the collection.

Of course the spending of this money is left up to elders or leadres of the local congregation.

May the church support a brotherhood paper out of its treasury? This has been done in the past, and I have been guilty of it, but it is without Scriptural authority, and I do that no more.

If a brother, or group of brethren want to publish a paper in which writers of the brotherhood write, simply as a private enterprise, supported by individual donations, subscriptions, certainly would be right.

Just as I am writing this article, as an individual, I am not supported in this, neither do I want support.

May we support a old folks home? Yes, as an individual Christian. But certainly not out of the church treasury. If an old Christian needs the care of an old folks home, certainly the church could take out of its treasury to buy services, as you would buy the services of a hospital. But the church could not contribute to the hospital. Many hospitals are run by Catholics, Methodists, Adventists etc.

Certainly the church cannot engage in enterprises, as selling ice cream, etc. to raise funds. But I could as an individual, sell ice cream or anything honorable, for gain, and I could give part of it, or all of it to the church in the contribution.

In Revelation 2:I0, we have this admonition and warning, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

A Christian must be faithful in all walks of life in order finally to inherit eternal life.

The conduct of many professed Christians are a disgrace to the cause of Christ. Social drinking seems to be very common, and even among some of the preachers, who advocate it. Shame! Shame! Yes after you have converted a drunkard, then comes along a preacher telling him it is alright just to take a little, so he does. He takes one, fine, then two drinks, and the more he drinks the better he fells, then bang! bang! he goes back where he was before he was converted to Christ.

Then there is always someone coming up with a man-made plan in which the churches cooperate, which is foreign to the Scriptures, such as churches pooling their resources to support preachers in the fields.

Bur notice the twaching of the Scriptures!

Churches sent direct to the preacher. Paul said, "I have robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service." 2 Corinthians II:8-9. Also in Philippians 4:I5-I6. "Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity." Epaphroditus was their messenger, Phil. 2:25.

May the good Lord bless us all, is my prayers.

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