

Benevolence: Collective and Individual

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

A. Three great works of:

1. The child of God under the law: prayer, fasting, and alms,
2. The church: evangelism, edification, and limited benevolence,
3. The Christian: serving God, serving Christ, serving one another.
4. Each is responsible to all of the works, especially the great ones, and not to neglect any or defer them to others.

B. Individual versus collective works

1. Assertions by institutional preachers: "The church can do anything that an individual can do, and an individual Christian can do anything the church can do; the Bible makes no distinction between duties of the Christian and works of the church."
2. If one can provide a single example that runs counter to a statement, then that statement is no longer true. If I were to say that the church can do anything that the individual can do, and you were to show me a verse which enjoins upon the individual that which is forbidden to the church, then my statement is false.
3. Apostle Paul gave such a verse - 1Tim. 5:16
4. The church is limited to assisting those who are genuine widows (Vs 9-11), and was to refuse to render benevolence to "younger widows." On the other hand, widows who did not meet the qualifications in this text were to be helped by their family members, and not the church.
5. One person cannot withdraw fellowship from another on behalf of the whole church - 1Cor. 5:4
6. The appointment of deacons - Acts 6:3-5

C. There exist duties of the individual Christian that simply cannot be performed by the church.

1. 2Cor. 9:7 - Paul tells Christians to give as they purpose in their hearts. The church is not permitted to purpose how much individuals give.
2. 1John 1:9 - The Christian is instructed to confess his sins; the church cannot confess the sins of the individual.
3. 1Cor. 7:3 - Married Christians are to render marital affection to their spouses; the church cannot do this.
4. Likewise, the duties of the church in limited benevolence and the duties of individuals in unlimited benevolence cannot be scripturally performed by the other.

I. LIMITED BENEVOLENCE OF THE CHURCH

A. Developing revelation on the work of limited benevolence for the church:

1. Acts 2:44-45 - They are sharing among themselves.
2. Acts 4:34-35 - They bring it to the elders for their oversight of its use.
3. Acts 6:1-3 - The apostles arrange for brethren charged to oversee it.

4. Acts 11:27-30 - Benevolence extends beyond the local church in which one church sends aid by trusted courier to another church where the need among brethren exists.
5. Rom. 15:25-27 - The aid was sent only for the poor among Christians.
6. 1Cor. 16:1-3 - The giving is by Christians and the collections were for the needs of Christians.
7. 2Cor. 8:3-4 - The collection was for ministering to the saints.
8. 2Cor. 9:1, 7-8, 12 - Three times it was said that the collection was for the needs of the saints.
9. 1Tim. 5:4-5, 9-11, 16 - Qualified widows are to be relieved by the church; unqualified widows are to be aided by their families.

II. UNLIMITED BENEVOLENCE OF INDIVIDUALS

- A. Gal. 6:9-10 - All persons may be aided by the individual, implying that the individual is not limited to help only members of the church.
 1. The context demands individual instruction and application.
- B. James 1:26-27 - All widows, qualified and unqualified, as well as any orphans can be helped by individual Christians as part of what defines them as practicing the true faith.
 1. The context demands individual, not collective, application.

Conclusion:

- A. Let the church do the works authorized in scripture, and let individual Christians eagerly engage in the remaining undone tasks.