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# EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

“...FOR THE EQUIPPING OF THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF SERVICE...” ~ EPHESIANS 4:12

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## THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE CHURCH

By Andrew Dow

There is an argument made by many people in the religious world that goes something like this: *The church is comprised of individual Christians. Therefore, whatever the individual Christian is authorized to do, the church can do as well.* At face value this sounds reasonable. However, I think this conclusion oversimplifies the issue and disregards biblical distinctions.

### A Biblical Distinction

Certain passages of Scripture make it clear that individual action and responsibilities are not always the same as collective action and responsibilities. Take for example Paul’s teaching concerning the support of widows: **“If any woman [man or woman, NKJV] who is a believer has dependant widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed”** (1 Tim 5:16, NASB). Yes, the church has an obligation to help **“widows indeed”** (v. 3, 16), but only if believing family members are unable. There is, then, a distinction between the individual and the collective.

Consider Jesus’ words about approaching a brother in sin: **“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private.... But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you.... If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church...”** (Matt 18:15–17). See the distinction?

What **“you,” “your brother,”** and **“one or two more”** do is different than what **“the church”** does.

Finally, think about the story of Ananias and Sapphira. After selling their land and lying about its proceeds, Peter said, **“While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control?”** (Acts 5:4). They, as individuals, could do whatever seemed right to them with their possessions. However, when they **“laid it at the apostles’ feet”** (v. 2) it was no longer theirs. Again, we see that a clear distinction is made between the individual and the collective.

### **This Distinction in Practice**

The Bible, unsurprisingly, instructs the church to do certain things collectively. For instance, we see the church collectively participating in evangelism (*e.g.*, Acts 13:1–3; Phil 1:3–5). This is consistent with Paul’s description of the church as **“the pillar and support of the truth”** (1 Tim 3:15). We also see that the church is expected to strengthen its own membership (Eph 4:12). Finally, the church of the New Testament provided financially for its needy (*e.g.*, Rom 15:25–26; 1 Cor 16:1–2; Acts 11:27–30). These are things that the church is authorized (and expected) to do as a group.

Equally as unsurprising, the Bible instructs Christians to do things as individuals. As individuals we are expected to work and provide for our families (1 Thess 3:10; 1 Tim 5:8), raise and discipline our children (Eph 6:4), and be generous toward all men (Eph 4:28). Of course, this is on top of our individual responsibilities to evangelize (2 Tim 2:2), edify (Heb 10:24), and support the brethren (Gal 6:10).

There are things that Scripture directs individuals to do that, if done collectively, would be inappropriate if not

absurd. Should Christians discipline their children? Yes! Should the church discipline children? No! Should Christians get a job? Yes! Should the church? No! What about the individuals ability to buy sports tickets, open a small coffee shop, give to a charity, or support a political candidate? Can the church do these things?

It is true that, at times, there is overlap between individual and collective action. However, we must be careful not to presume that the church can do everything that the individual can do. To do so will inevitably lead us to absurd and unbiblical conclusions.

## **HUMOR IN THE BIBLE**

*By Andrew Dow*

Paul wrote, as translated in the KJV, “**Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks**” (Eph 5:4). Wait a minute. Did Paul just say that Christians aren’t supposed to tell jokes?

Did you know that God has a sense of humor? I don’t mean that flippantly, but as a statement of fact. Aaron, after molding an idol for Israel, defended himself, “**I threw [the gold] into the fire, and out came this calf**” (Exo 32:24). When Eglon died at the hand of Ehud, his guards were embarrassed to go check on him because they assumed he was “**relieving himself**” (Judg 3:24). Elijah mocks Baal’s inability to consume a sacrifice (1 Kings 18). Jonah cared more for a plant than a city full of people (Jonah 4:5–11).

Even in the New Testament, God employs sarcasm, irony, hyperbole, and other forms of humor. While the Proverb says, “**A joyful heart is good medicine**” (17:22),

God does not use humor just to get a laugh. Humor is used in Scripture to grab our attention and emphasize a point!

For example, consider Matthew 7:3—**“Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?”** This is a funny illustration when you stop and think about it. Listen up! Don’t judge others according to a standard by which you’re not willing to measure yourself.

So, what does Paul mean in Ephesians 5:4? Most translations render the term, **“coarse jesting”** (NASB, NKJV). Crude humor is always inappropriate and misunderstood humor can be dangerous (cf. Eph 4:15). However, humor can be attention grabbing and instructive. We need to be watchful for Scripture’s use of humor and learn from it.

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<b>A SPECIAL SERIES OF LESSONS</b> (LESSONS BY JESSE FLOWERS)	
Sun 9:30am	At Jacob’s Well
Sun 10:30am	52 Days
Sun 6:00pm	The Christian and Depression
Mon 7:00pm	Building Your Own Faith
Tue 7:00pm	How Will I Be Remembered
Wed 7:00pm	What Can One Person Do?

**“GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES...”**  
**(MATTHEW 28:19-20)**