

# The Brown Street Beacon

*"...Shine out among them like beacon lights,*

*holding out to them the Word of Life" (Phil 2:15-16)*



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## Individual Action vs. Church Action

**T**here are but two divinely authorized functioning units of the spiritual body of Christ, the individual member and the local congregation. Christ is said to be the head over all things to the church which is His body (Ephesians 1:23). It follows that He rules as head over both the individual members and the local congregation in all their respective activities. The duties of both functioning units are authorized by the Lord. He is the only voice they are to hear, and that voice is revealed to us through His written word, the New Covenant. There, and there only, can the duties enjoined by the King upon both individual Christians and local congregations be learned.

The New Testament reveals that the duties of individual Christians embrace many areas of life other than local church responsibilities. A Christians must be subject to the will of his Master in everything. Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). To live by the faith is to live by the gospel. When one lives by the gospel, Christ lives in him. The gospel teaches Christians how to properly behave themselves in the home. Husbands and wives, and parents and children are taught their respective duties in the home, but the home is not the church and the church is not the home. They were established at different times and for different purposes, and the duties of one are not the duties of the other. The fact that I am a Christians and in the kingdom of God obligates me to fulfill faithfully my duties in the home, but these are not church actions. The gospel teaches Christians how to properly conduct their affairs as citizens in their relation to the civil power but their duties in this area of life are not church functions. Being a member of the spiritual body of Christ obligates me to be subject to the will of my Master in every relation of life, whether in civil affairs, home relations, business activities, or social and recreational functions, but my duties in these relations are not church duties or fulfilled through church action. Church duty and church action have to do with the function of the local church as we have already seen.

Now, what duties and what actions are required of the local church? These must be established by the authority of Christ and can only be learned by a study of the teaching of Christ as divinely revealed. If something cannot be established by the teaching of Christ, He did not authorize it, and if He did not authorize it, it does not belong to His church. Church duty is that which is required of a church, just as individual duty is that which is required of an individual. We have seen that the only unit in the divine system that is capable of functioning as a church is the local congregation. It follows that only congregational responsibilities are church duties, and that church action is congregational action. Congregational action is joint or collective action by the congregation as a whole or such action as is accomplished through the duly appointed servants of the congregation.

Actually there are relatively few duties which the Word of God assigns local churches to do as churches. Little is said about what is to be done as a collectivity in coordinated group action. By far the greater portion of the New Testament deals with what the individual is to be and do rather than what the local churches as churches are to do. There are, however, some duties which the Master has assigned local churches and which require collective action on the part of the local church. While these duties require individual participation, the action is to be performed by the individuals as a coordinated group functioning together as a whole. The duty is distributive in its requirement of individual participation in the performance of all congregational, or church, responsibilities, but the fact that individual participation is required in both cases does not destroy the distinction between the two kinds of action. One is individual and personal while the other is collective and congregational. This distinction must ever be maintained.

Furthermore, as it takes the word of God to establish individual responsibility, it can take no less than the word of God to establish congregational responsibility. Now, what duties are enjoined by the word of God upon the local congregation, or church? May I list those I have been able to find thus far?

1. An assembly of the saints (Hebrews 10:24-25).
2. In such an assembly the saints are to observe the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23).
3. They are to sing psalms unto the Lord, and with spiritual songs teach and admonish one another (1 Corinthians 14:23; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).
4. They are to pray together for one another and for all men (Acts 12:5; 1 Timothy 2:1).
5. They are to preach and attend to the teaching of God's word (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 14:26).
6. They are to lay by in store on the first day of the week as they have been prospered to finance their collective responsibility (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).
7. They are to support the preaching of the gospel (2 Corinthians 11:8; Philippians 4:15-16).
8. They are to provide for the fulfillment of the needs of certain destitute saints (Acts 4:34-35; 2 Corinthians 8-9; Romans 15:25-31; 1 Timothy 5:16).
9. The local church is to exercise discipline against its ungodly members (1 Corinthians 5:1-5; 1 Thessalonians 3:1-15).

Now brethren, I have not been able to find any other duties or responsibilities assigned by the Lord to local churches to be carried out through collective action. Have you? There are many actions which the individual Christian may engage in that are not divinely authorized for the local church. Let individuals perform their duties as individuals and let local churches perform their duties as local churches and do not try to place the responsibilities of individuals upon the church. The functions of the church as a church do not involve it in political action, social reform, or recreational programs. To turn the church into a kind of social club and a recreational gymnasium is a perversion of the divine pattern and for it there is no excuse. May we all think on these things.