

Pleasant Valley
Church of Christ

3317 Amidon
Wichita KS 67204
(316) 838-4195
www.letjesusleadus.org

Schedule of Services

Sunday

Classes 9:30 am
Worship 10:30 am
Evening 6:00 pm

Wednesday

Classes 7:30 pm

The Pleasant Valley Church of Christ is a non-denominational group of believers who are committed to following Jesus in our attitudes, our relationships, and our worship. If you want the same thing in your life, please contact us. We'd like to help.

Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are from the New King James Version Bible, Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Wings



*"But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles" (Isaiah 40:31)*

December 2, 2007

Churches and individuals

by David King

"If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows" (1 Tim. 5:16).

Paul's instructions in this verse provide a practical plan for dealing with needy widows in a local church. But there is a deeper principle here that deserves our attention: the distinction between individual and church action.

The fact that Paul draws a clear line between what an **individual** ought to do, and what the **congregation** ought to do, suggests that the two entities are governed by different sets of rules. Other New Testament passages confirm that conclusion.

For example, in describing how to deal with a brother who has sinned, Jesus said the first step is for the aggrieved party to approach the sinner personally; only if that approach fails to resolve the issue can the congregation get involved (Matt. 18:15-17). Based on this distinction, it would be wrong for a congregation to force its way into a personal matter without individuals first fulfilling their responsibility.

Paul addressed the Corinthians' abuse of the Lord's Supper by emphasizing the distinction between church action and individual action: The church comes together to partake of a special memorial "feast"; common meals are to be eaten by individuals at home, not in church (1 Cor. 11:17-34). Keep them separate!

This is not an abstract exercise in semantics. In the issues that have torn apart churches of Christ over the last half-century, some have naively argued that "whatever the individ-

ual can do, the church can do." So if the individual is instructed to care for orphans and widows (Jas. 1:27), then the church can build orphan homes. If the individual can engage in physical exercise (1 Tim. 4:8), then the church can build a gymnasium. If the individual should do good to all men (Gal. 6:10), then churches should be active in all kinds of community service activities. Brethren have justified a wide range of "church" involvement in activities based on the premise that there really is no difference between what an individual can do and what a church can do.

But brethren apply that understanding inconsistently. Individuals can (and should) buy, sell, and make a profit (Jas. 4:13; Eph. 4:28); can churches therefore set up for-profit business enterprises? Individuals are instructed to show hospitality to strangers (Heb. 13:2); can churches therefore get into the hotel business? Individuals can get married, have children, and raise families (Eph. 5:22 - 6:4; 1 Tim. 5:14). May churches therefore adopt a communal approach to familial relations, sharing wives and child-raising responsibilities equally across the group?

All this may sound ridiculous, but it is logically sound, if we start with the premise that there is no distinction between what an individual can do and what a church can do.

The lesson here is a simple study in Bible interpretation. Before we start using passages to justify pet projects, we need to carefully determine whether the passages are addressing individual responsibility or church action.