
Words of Truth

Institutionalism – Is A Mindset

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People who generally believe and practice Institutionalism have a noticeable mindset. Those individuals have a “we” instead of “me” mentality. What I mean by the previous statement is that those individuals that have an institutional way of thinking are those who are looking to pass on their individual responsibilities to a group of people.

An example of the institutional mindset is, instead of personally looking after a fatherless child or widow (James 1:26-27); send them to an orphan home with a check for others to do the work. Another example is, instead of being hospitable as an individual (Acts 16:13-15, Romans 12:13, Hebrews 13:1-2, and I Peter 4:8-11); expect the church to organize dinners, lunches, potlucks, etc. Another example is, instead of individual evangelists training others to teach the Gospel (II Timothy 2:2); have a preaching school do that work.

Notice, in the examples above, we are not even addressing whether or not the Lord’s money collected on the first day of the week (I Corinthians 16:1-2) is being used to fund the mentioned works. What we are addressing, regardless of who funds it, is the passing off of individual responsibilities onto an organized body of people. Before we would even address where the funding comes from, we have to address this mindset of turning over a person’s individual responsibilities to a group of people. Let’s get into how God wants us to do things when any of us might be presented with an opportunity to do His work.

When Given An Opportunity To Do Good

Consider this Parable and the reason it was taught: *“And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the*

host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise" (Luke 10:25-37).

Now let's consider some applications to what we just read. Did the Samaritan, that we learned to follow the example of, call upon the "Church of Christ Disaster Relief Effort" to help the truly needy man? Did the Samaritan, that we learned to follow the example of, call for the treasurer of a religious body to send funds to help the truly needy man? Obviously, we can see that the Samaritan in the Parable, whom serves as an approved example to follow, took individual responsibility for the truly needy man in the account. When given the opportunity, we need to follow the "I" instead of "they, we, us, etc." thinking towards doing good works.

Much Of Our Responsibilities As Christians Are Individual Responsibilities

Consider these inspired statements: *"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works... For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad... Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting... And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be"* (Matthew 16:27, II Corinthians 5:10, Galatians 6:7-8, and Revelation 22:12).

We, as individual Christians, are expected to be doers of God's will (James 1:18-25). Certainly, there are things we need each other for as a collective body (i.e. I Corinthians 11:23-33, Ephesians 5:19, I Thessalonians 5:11-14, Hebrews 3:13, Hebrews 10:22-25, James 5:16, etc.). However, the majority of what we do as Christians is outside of the assembly. It is in the world where we are to shine (Matthew 5:14-16 and Philippians 2:14-16). Our actions in this world from the home (Ephesians 5:22-6:4), to secular employment (I Thessalonians 4:10-12), to social affairs (I Corinthians 10:23-33), etc.; are all tasks we take on as individual Christians. We cannot look to others for them to do these things for us. As you read at the beginning of this section of this article, we will stand individually accountable before God for our actions as Christians.

Conclusion

There is much more that could be said, but I am trying to simplify some of these things to produce thinking that will get people away from the errors of Institutionalism. The world promotes the institutional mindset heavily. Think of statements such as one that often applies to raising a child. That statement is, "it takes a village". WRONG! Statements like that are intended to drive people to a collective way of action in all things instead of personal accountability. The world is not our standard of thinking (Romans 12:1-2). Now there is another way of thinking that somewhat applies to some of what we have discussed in this study. That is, the idea that if an individual Christian can do something, the church can too. That is what we will discuss next.