
Words of Truth

Underemphasizing Individual Accountability

By: Brian A. Yeager

Upon reflection of things past and consideration of many current online sermons and articles amongst so-called "churches of Christ", I have noted that preaching about the church is common. What I mean by that statement is that sermons about the work of the church, worship of the church, congregational apostasy, etc.; are easy to find online. What are harder to find is sermons that apply to our individual accountability. Lessons on how to live as a Christian, aside from the work and worship of the church, are not as common as the lessons on the collective matters. I am not trying to infer lessons like that are not needed. However, constant teaching on these things is missing the balance. In fact, it is weighing too much on the collective. I have realized this for many years, but have we all realized this?

Our worship together does not make up the most hours of our week. The work of this congregation does not make up the most hours of this week. Therefore, does it make sense to make the majority of our teaching about our collective actions when we spend most of our time outside of the assembly? In fact, wouldn't it make more sense that more of the teaching and studying we do applies to what we do most? Don't we spend most of our time living apart from the company of all the local saints? Here is another question; will we be judged collectively or apart from one another? The answers to these questions should, if you are honest, show you that individual accountability is far greater than our collective accountability.

We Will Stand Individually Before Our Lord

Notice these Scriptures: *"Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds... For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God... Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour... 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... But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden. Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. 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” (Romans 2:1-6, Romans 14:11-12, I Corinthians 3:8, II Corinthians 5:10, and Galatians 6:4-8).

For the sake of clarity, I am not suggesting that what we do collectively is ignored in the Judgment Day. Clearly, the Scriptures show we will be accountable for things done or not done in this congregation (Revelation 2:1-3:22). However, as the Scriptures I quoted above CLEARLY show, we will be individually accountable for all things. Since most of our time is spent aside from the collective works we do as a congregation, doesn't it make spiritually minded sense to focus MORE on what we do individually?

We Will Answer For What We Do All Of The Time, Not Just Our Times Of Assembly

Living faithfully as a Christian certainly includes the work we do together (Acts 20:7, I Corinthians 12:14-27, Ephesians 4:16, I Thessalonians 5:11-14, Hebrews 10:22-25, etc.). Yet, many of the members here spend forty plus hours per week working secular jobs as they should be doing (Ephesians 4:28, II Thessalonians 3:10, and I Timothy 5:8). Do we spend forty hours per week collectively assembled? NO! Many of our brethren here spend time with their physical families, as they should (Ephesians 5:22-6:4), with some exceptions (Matthew 10:34-37 and II Thessalonians 3:6). Don't many of us spend more time with our physical family members, aside from the assembly, than we do our collective spiritual family members? Therefore, should we have more studies on what to do within the assembly or more studies on how to be husbands, wives, faithful children, etc.?

Being faithful in Christ has much more to do with our lives outside of the assemblies than within the assembly. Our worship can be right (John 4:23-24). Our collective works can be authorized and acceptable to God (Revelation 2:2-3). Yet, each one of us could end up in Hell because we master being the Lord's church and fail at being individual Christians.

Being A Disciple

Getting to Heaven is much more about being a follower of Christ (John 8:31) than just being a member of the church of Christ. I know that statement can be twisted, but it is a fact. Faithful Christians are members of the church (Acts 2:47). However, just being a member of the church does not make one a faithful Christian (I Corinthians 5:1-13). To be in Heaven, you and I need to do everything God instructs (James 2:10). Being part of a faithful congregation is just one detail in a much larger set of instructions. I need to be a faithful disciple of Christ (James 1:21-27). You need to be a faithful disciple of Christ (Colossians 1:23). We need to be faithful followers, together, of Christ (Hebrews 3:1-6). Just getting the "us" right will not make "you" right.

Conclusion

I do not know that I have said all that I intended to in the best way possible. One thing I can do is leave your studies here with two Scriptures that can say better than I have. Therefore, here you go: *“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation... Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”* (Acts 2:40 and Philipians 2:12).