

The Work of the Church #4 (Benevolence)

Introduction:

- I. We continue this morning our series of lessons on the work of the church. Last we saw that the primary work of the church is evangelism. Evangelism has to do with spreading the good news of Jesus Christ and Him crucified to those who are lost. Remember now, when dealing with the work of the church, we are talking about what the local church can do with the Lord's money that is raised by the voluntary offering from saints on the first day of the week, as well as things that are planned, provided and participated in by the local church. We are not talking about the individual and what he or she can do, but with what the local church can do. The local church can and must engage in evangelism (**Acts 11:22-24; Phil. 4:15-17, 2:25; 2 Cor. 11:8,9; 1 Thess. 1:7, 8**).

But now, we emphasized last week that while we must do evangelistic work, we must do it scripturally. I cannot not emphasize enough the importance of realizing that where there is a divine pattern, that pattern must be followed (**Heb. 8:1-5**). Now keep this in mind—what we think about the pattern is irrelevant. It doesn't matter if we like the pattern or not. It doesn't matter if we see the logic in the pattern or not. It doesn't matter how the majority of religious people feel about the pattern. We must do all things according to the pattern, **PERIOD!** And one thing that we see about the pattern in evangelism, is that it was done in such a way that never violated the autonomy of the local church. Each local church must do its own work and there is no authority for a centralization of local churches pooling their finances together to do a "brotherhood" work. Listen to me: the moment we start doing that we create something that is smaller than the universal church and larger than the local church and that is a denomination pure and simple.

II. God=s Pattern On The Work of Evangelism.

1. The supporting church or churches sent directly to the preacher (**Phil. 4:15**).
2. The supporting church or churches selected their own messenger or messengers by whom they sent the support (**Phil. 2:25**).
3. The preacher received the support from the hands of the messenger of the supporting church (**2 Cor. 11:8, 9; Phil. 4:16-18**).
4. **NO CHURCH EVER SENT TO ANOTHER CHURCH FOR THE PURPOSE OF SUPPORTING THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL.**

EACH SUPPORTING CHURCH SENT DIRECTLY TO THE PREACHER.

III. Now let's look at the second work that God has given the church to do.

Lesson:

I. The Work of Benevolence.

- A. The word *benevolence* means *a kindly act or a gift given out of generosity, especially a financial gift*. Now, what does the bible say about the local churches engaging in such activity (**Acts 2:41-46; 4:32-35; 11:27-30; Rom. 15:25-27; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8 & 9**). All of these passages show us that a part of the work of the church is to help the needy. Here we must point out that in all of these passages we see the church helping needy saints. It is not the work of the church to help all of the poor of the world. Keep in mind we are not talking about the responsibility of the Christian, we are talking about the church. We will look at the individual Christian's responsibility in just a moment, but now we need to emphasize the pattern set forth for the church.

The work of the church, that is what the church can do with the money it has gathered by saints on the first day of the week, is to help only those in the body of Christ. Why? Because that is the pattern. It's not my job to second guess the pattern that God has set forth. It is my job to follow the pattern. Now can we be sure that the pattern is for the church to help out of its treasury saints only? Yes. Listen to me: In order to discover God's will on any subject is to gather the sum total of passages on that subject. When you have every that God has said on the subject, you have the pattern. It is not enough to look at just one passage when God has said more in other places (**e.g. of some teaching faith only by Jn. 3:16 alone**). No we must look at every thing that God has said on a given subject. Now, we have already read all that God has said about the church doing benevolent work. Look at what the Bible says:

Acts 2:44-46 – “all that believed.”

Acts 4:32-35 – “them that believed.”

Acts 11:27-30 – “send relief to unto the brethren.”

Rom. 15:25 – “minister unto the saints.”

Rom. 15:26 – “contribution for the poor saints.”

1 Cor. 16:1 – “the collection for the saints.”

2 Cor. 8:4 – “ministering to the saints.”

2 Cor. 9:1 – “ministering to the saints.”

This is the pattern that we must follow. If we can deviate from the pattern here, why can't we deviate in other places? And if we can deviate from the pattern in one place, why can we deviate in two places, then, 200 places, and then 2,000 places? And who is going to decide which pattern we can deviate from and which pattern we can't? We must stick with the Bible!

- B.** Let's use some Bible logic in determine the work of the church in this area.

Rom. 10:17:

Faith comes by hearing the word of God.

The word of God says nothing about the church relieving the poor of the world.

Relieving the poor of the world is not of faith.

2 Tim. 3:16-17:

The scriptures furnish us unto all good works.

The scriptures say nothing of the church relieving the poor of the world.

The church relieving the poor of the world not a good work.

1 Pet. 4:11:

We must speak according to the oracles of God.

The oracles of God say nothing of the church relieving the poor of the world.

Saying the church should relieve the poor of the world is not speaking according to the oracles of God.

- C.** Some say that because the Bible doesn't say “saints only” the poor of the world can be relieved. If such were the case, however, we could justify just about anything (**e.g., musical instruments, cake and coke on the Lord's table, etc.**).

II. The Poor of The World.

- A.** Does all this mean that the poor of the world should be ignored by Christians. **NO!** On an individual basis, Christians should and must help any who are in need (**Gal. 6:10; Jas. 1:27; Matt. 25:35-46; Lk. 10:30-37**). But the work of the church is to help needy saints. We should not forget that there is difference between the individual saint

and the church (**1 Tim. 5:16**). Hence, the church cannot do with its money everything that an individual Christian can do with he or her money.

- B.** Now, some try to justify the church getting involved in helping all the poor by the Gal. 6:10 and Jas. 1:27. Their obvious mistake is that they are applying two passages that refer to individual action to the work that the local church does collectively (**Gal. 6:1,3,4, 6,7,8**). Clearly the us and we of verses 9 & 10 are referring to Christians acting on an individual basis. Now look at the context of James (**Jas. 1: 18-27**). Again, it is clear that the command in ver. 27 is directed to individuals, and not to local churches. To say that these passages refer to churches is to make the same mistake that denominational preachers make when they apply the branches of Jn. 15 to denominations instead of individuals (**chart**).

III. Benevolence and the Sponsoring Church Arrangement.

Much like evangelism, some churches engage in benevolent work that destroys the autonomy of local churches. Again some have set up “sponsoring churches” to do the work of benevolence. Just as was the case with evangelism, the sponsoring church arrangement not only destroys local autonomy, it also indicates that the local church is not sufficient to do its own work. Furthermore, it too is a violation of the divine pattern set forth in the word of God. When we search the scriptures, we find the following:

- 1. The sending church was a church with superior ability (financially).**
- 2. The receiving church was always in need.**
- 3. The purpose was that there might be equality, a freedom for want (2 Cor.8:13,14).**
- 4. The sending church selected its own messenger (1 Cor. 16:3,4; 2 Cor. 8:23).**

Conclusion:

The work of a church is important. We must do all that God has commanded us to do as a local church, but we must do no more. If we begin doing things for which we have no authority, we sin against God by going beyond His word. Let us be satisfied with doing just that which God has told us to do.