

Benevolence

An Apologetic on the Use of Church Funds for the Needy

Instructor's Manual

By: Wade Holt

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord:..." (Isaiah 1:18)

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Introduction

I studied and reviewed many documents for the preparation of this study. In doing so, I formed many thoughts on the subject. The study grew in scope and content as I studied and put some of these materials together. It started out as a brief study for personal use. I did not keep track of my references as I should have. I apologize in advance for any people or publications that I may have inadvertently neglected to acknowledge.

This study is based on what I believe the Bible teaches on the subject. It is not a "Church of Christ" or other denominational view. The "Church of Christ" seems to be more closely aligned to the Biblical view than most other denominations.

However, there is also a lot of "confusion" and "misunderstanding" among even the Churches of Christ.

Background

Before beginning our study I think it is important to look at some of the underlying issues that contribute to the confusion surrounding benevolence. We will not try to identify all of the issues, but we will look at some of the main ones.

Institutionalism

Somewhere between the late 1950's and early 1960's institutionalism began to creep into the church. This has caused a great deal of angst among the brethren. Churches have split, friendships have been lost, and the church has been damaged over this issue. One cannot study the subject of benevolence without dealing with the issue of institutionalism.

Institutionalism basically means that the church sends money from its treasury to a group or organization to fulfill a need that the church feels like it is partly or wholly responsible for.

In the very early 1800's religious minded people wanted to spread the gospel to the entire world. They wondered how they could do this when they had limited numbers of people and limited resources. There was also concern that the message was not exactly the same. Groups like the Baptist Missionary Society was formed in 1792. The London Missionary Society was formed in 1795. The Church Missionary Society was formed in 1799.

The idea was that a central governing body could better organize and manage such an undertaking than could a bunch of small, disorganized, and inexperienced churches. If every small congregation would send financial support to one of these organizations, they would pool the money, hire the

preachers, and develop the materials to send “missionaries” to the lost world to preach. The idea was that this helped each of the small churches feel like they were part of a big important work and that they were fulfilling the command to go into all of the world and preach the gospel. This model began to spread throughout all denominations including the Church of Christ.

Some Christians and churches began to wonder if it was scriptural to give their funds to a third party to spend on their behalf without their having any say as to how it was used, and without the involvement of a “church” and its elders. These people began to wonder if they were violating the New Testament pattern of benevolence. Among these people were Thomas and Alexander Campbell. They were famous for coining the phrase “speak where the Bible speaks, and be silent where the Bible is silent”.

It finally split the Church of Christ and eventually lead to what is known as “The Restoration Movement”.

In the 1950’s and 1960’s the hot topic was orphan’s homes. A lot of churches felt that **James 1:27** either required or approved their support of orphan’s homes. Then nursing homes started to spring up and the same scripture was used to send money to them. After that it churches started sending money to “Christian” schools, other churches, and various secular causes. That is always a problem when you start down a slippery slope. These topics will be discussed later in this study.

Apostasy

You no doubt have heard this word mentioned in Bible studies and sermons. You may not know what it really means.

Apostasy, from the Greek word apostasia, means “a defiance of an established system or authority; a rebellion; an abandonment or breach of faith.” In the first-century world, apostasy was a technical term for political revolt or defection. And just like in the first century, apostasy threatens the Body of Christ today.[vi]

The book of Jude is written to warn us against the dangers of apostasy. In verse 3 he states that we should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

I don’t think a lot of people notice this word “once”. The gospel has only been delivered to us one time. A lot of people think that the gospel is a living document that is open to change and different interpretations as time goes on.

This is not true and those that fall into this group are deceiving themselves. Titus went on in verse 4 to explain that:

4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

The problem with apostasy is that it creeps in as a wolf in sheep's clothing. The elders are constantly on guard to notice these trends and nip them in the bud.

You start out by just stepping off of the path. First one step, then another, then pretty soon you can't even see the path. This will be discussed a little more in depth later on.

In verse 5 Titus reminded them how God lead the people out of the land of Egypt, but then destroyed them because their unbelief.

In verse 6 Titus tells them of the Devil and his angels which did not keep their first estate, but left their habitation. He says that these fallen angels will be cast into everlasting punishment on judgment day.

In verse 17 Titus tells us to remember the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we study benevolence, it is important that we remain true to the gospel which was once and only once delivered to us.

We have to adopt the mantra that began during the restoration movement of speaking where the Bible speaks and being silent where the Bible is silent.

That brings us to our next set of issues.

Hermeneutics

Like apostasy, you have probably heard the word "hermeneutic" or the phrase "A new hermeneutic" in your study of the scriptures.

Hermeneutics basically means to interpret or translate. Some feel that the words spoken in the scriptures are too strict, too prescriptive, too offensive, are out of date, or can't be understood. As a result, there needs to be a new way of interpreting the scriptures. You often hear the phrase "Out With the Old and In With the New". This attitude is prominent in almost all denominations, and, sadly, often within the churches of Christ.

Titus warned us of this attitude. The new hermeneutic is proof that anything tastes good if you put enough sugar on it. Jesus never shyed away from

confronting sin head on and didn't care if He hurt anyone's feelings in the process.

Unfortunately, books like the Bible and commentaries are being written in a way that tries to be less offensive or confrontational.

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They are basically rewriting the Bible to make it read the way man thinks that it should read. The word "Shall" or "Shall Not" is now being interpreted as merely a suggestion, not a command.

In **Matthew 21:23** the Jews asked Jesus "...*By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?*"

We should ask the people looking to change the way the scriptures are written the same question.

We are not going to go into the subject of hermeneutics during this study as it would detract from the original intent of our study in benevolence.

We have to remember that the Bible is the spoken will of God. We cannot take liberties with what has been written. We are warned in Revelation 22:18-19 about the dangers of adding to or taking from the word of God.

The issue of hermeneutics goes hand in hand with the next set of issues we intend to briefly cover.

Conservatism versus Liberalism

We discussed the new hermeneutic in the previous section. This has caused the church to be defined in one of two categories. Churches either consider themselves to be conservative or liberal; although, in most cases, the liberal churches do not consider themselves to be liberal.

Liberal churches think that what they are doing is just fine, and, would probably argue that they are not in fact liberal. Other liberal churches proudly wear the badge of liberalism in their effort to be an all-encompassing group that proudly accepts everyone. They tend to be weak on discipline. They accept people into their midst that might be openly living in sin, such as an unmarried couple, or a homosexual couple. Some members may have children born out of wedlock from being promiscuous that have not repented and the group just overlooks it.

Maybe a son or daughter has a child born out of wedlock and the member is happy for the couple and wants it announced in the bulletin. There is little to no shame brought upon anyone in a liberal environment.

Conservative churches on the other hand, often proclaim themselves as being so. They have good strong elders. Discipline is strong. When a member is not living as they should, they can expect a visit from the elders.

In theology, a conservative tends to value foundational documents, long-held beliefs, and established patterns. Conservatives tend to talk about ethics in terms of "responsibilities" ..."liberal"...has been defined as "marked by generosity, openhanded; not literal or strict; loose and broad minded."...morals are thought of in terms of "rights". [vii]

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Conservatives tend to be opposed to any departure from the scriptures. They look for book, chapter, and verse for everything they do. Conservatives follow the three accepted means of establishing Biblical authority for what they do. These are:

1. Direct Command;
2. Apostolic Example; and/or
3. Necessary Inference.

Liberal minded churches tend to be less concerned with the way they establish Biblical authority.

There is an old saying that "If you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything".

Liberalism is the leading cause for the confusion surrounding benevolence.

We don't want to get too bogged down into the discussion of conservatism versus liberalism, but since it seems to be the main stumbling block to the subject of benevolence, let us take a look at a table that compares the liberal mindset to the conservative mindset.

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	Liberal Churches	Conservative Churches
1.	<i>Have missionary, benevolent and educational organizations to execute the work of the church.</i>	Have no missionary, benevolent and educational organizations to execute the work of the church. They believe the local church is God's only organization to do his work (Phil. 1:1; Acts 14:23).
2.	<i>Have "educational directors," "associate ministers," "youth directors," and "superintendents" over their human organizations.</i>	Have evangelists, elders (pastors) and teachers (Eph. 4:11).
3.	<i>Seek to get crowds with "youth meetings," "rallies," carnal rewards such as trips to Opryland and all kinds of promotions (such as the "bus ministry").</i>	Engage in none of these things, but seek to draw men to Christ with the preaching of the gospel (Jn. 6:45; Rom. 1:16).
4.	<i>Emphasize society and the physical man by appealing to the carnal nature with "church banquets," "church kitchens," "church camps," "fellowship halls," and all kinds of parties.</i>	Do not believe the church is to provide the social needs of man (Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 11:22, 34; Jn. 18:36).
5.	<i>Elevate their preachers above the rest of the members by using such titles as "doctor."</i>	Reject all such titles as unscriptural (Matt. 23:7-12).
6.	<i>Support and operate schools for secular education, beginning with kindergarten and going through schools of higher education.</i>	Do not support or operate any schools. They believe that the church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15)
7.	<i>Do much of their work through what they call the "sponsoring church" arrangement - many churches pooling their funds under one eldership to do a general work all churches are equally related to.</i>	Reject this arrangement as a violation of the New Testament pattern of congregational cooperation. In New Testament times one church only helped another church when the receiving church was in want (or need) - unable to do its own work (Acts 11:27-30). (Cooperation in such work does not require the centralized "sponsoring church").
8.	<i>Base many of their practices on the silence of the Scriptures, and appeal to the traditions of the past.</i>	Base all their practices on the unadulterated gospel of Christ (Matt. 28:18; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).
9.	<i>Expect their preachers to be modern-day "pastors," running after the members and visiting the hospitals on a regular basis and to be the "head planner" of all their projects and promotions.</i>	Do not expect their preachers to leave the work of God to serve tables (Acts 6:20). They have deacons and godly women to take care of the "physical needs" of the congregation and elders to do the planning (Acts 20:28). The preacher is left free to study, meditate, pray and carry on the work of preaching the gospel to the lost (2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Tim. 4:12-16). The preacher is to visit the sick because he is a Christian (Matt. 25:36), not as a "preacher duty."
10.	<i>Have "special singing" in the assembly - different choral groups are invited in to sing.</i>	Have nothing but congregational singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

Source for this table:

(Truth Magazine, 3 May 1979, p. 290). Guardian of Truth XXXIV: 13, p. 396, July 5, 1990

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Discussion Questions

1. What does the word institutionalism mean? _____

2. Do you think that it is important to send missionaries into the world to spread the gospel? _____
3. If so, who should pay for it? _____
4. What did institutionalism eventually lead to? _____
5. What is your definition of the word apostasy? _____

6. Which writer of the Bible warned against apostasy? _____
7. How does apostasy enter the church? _____
8. What was the leading slogan of the restoration movement? _____

9. What is your definition of the word hermeneutics? _____

10. Do you believe that we need a new hermeneutic? _____
11. What is your definition of the word liberal? _____

12. What is your definition of the word conservative? _____

13. Do you consider yourself to be more liberal or conservative? _____

The Work of the Church

When I use the word “church” I am mostly referring to the Church of Christ as I am not familiar enough with all denominations to delve into their policies. I may reference other denominations where I am familiar with their policy, but the intent of this study is to examine what the Bible teaches on the subject, not necessarily what other denominations may teach.

As we get into this study, it is important to note that the church exists for three purposes:

- Preaching and teaching the gospel;
- Edification of its members; and
- Benevolent works.

Let us take just a moment and look at these three purposes or “works” if you prefer. We are going to present a few verses that confirm each of these works. This will not be an all-inclusive list as that is not the intent of this work on benevolence.

Evangelism/Preaching to the Lost

Of the three works listed above, evangelism and preaching to the lost would have to be the number one priority of the church. Without the continued evangelism to the lost the church would die.

Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸ And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. ¹⁹ Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ²⁰ Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

There are several points in these two verses. First of all, Jesus tells them that He has been given all power in Heaven and on earth. Secondly, Jesus told them to go and teach all nations. This is the primary work of the church; to preach to the lost. Lastly, He told them to teach us to observe all things that He had commanded them. They were not free to change or adjust the message and neither are we.

Mark 16:15

15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

This is Mark's version of what Jesus told them. They were to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. It was not to stop with just the apostles. They were not going to live forever. We have to pick up the mantle and run with it. And, we have to train our children so that they will be able to continue spreading the Word when we are gone.

Romans 10:14-15

14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

This is a very poignant statement. If there is no evangelism eventually there will be a group that has never heard the word. How can they hear without a preacher? Evangelism needs to have a succession plan. This is how the church has been around for over 2,000 years. The church is always just one generation away from ceasing to exist. We have to continue to send preachers into the field.

1 Corinthians 1:17-18

17 For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. 18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

This passage once again points out the importance of preaching.

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2 Timothy 4:1-5

1 I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; 2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be

turned unto fables. ⁵ But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

This passage also talks about the importance of preaching, but goes further by warning of the issues we discussed earlier in this study. It warns of the pending danger of apostasy and the new hermeneutic. We are there now.

These passages clearly point to the importance of preaching for the continuation of the church.

Edification of Its Members

Edification is a very important work of the church. Edification is sometimes confused with benevolence. To edify means to build up or strengthen. Edification is done at the individual level and the church level.

The individual and the church both need to be edified to continue, to grow, and to please God.

Edification at the Individual Level

Christians are required to edify each other and those that in the world. The following passages address individual edification.

Romans 14:19

¹⁹ Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

This chapter is talking about Christians edifying weak brothers. There were several examples of where new Christians were trying to hold on to various parts of the Old Law. It was causing divisions among them. The individuals were not being edified, built up, by coming together. Paul was telling them to get on the same page so there would be harmony.

Romans 15:2

² Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.

We are to offer edification to our neighbors as well. But, we are to help him for his “good”. We are not to help them when they are doing things contrary to the scriptures. But we set the example then encourage them to become Christians.

Romans 15:14

¹⁴ Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.

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1 Corinthians 10:23-24

23 All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. 24 Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.

During the time of this writing the church was divided over the issue of eating meat offered to idols. Idol worship was rampant during this time. There were all sorts of pagan gods that the idolaters sacrificed animals to. The idolatrous priest would often take the sacrificed meat and sell it to the markets and keep the money. People that purchased this meat may or may not know that it was a piece of sacrificed meat. The early Christians were afraid that if they ate meat that was sacrificed to a pagan god that they would be sinning. Other Christians knew that meat offered to an idol did not have any type of sin attached to it. The meat was just meat. Paul was saying here that it did not violate his conscience to eat meat offered to idols so it was okay if he did. Paul was saying that if his eating of meat offered to idols offended anyone that he would not do so because it might create hard feeling which are contrary to edification. He did not want to be a stumbling block to someone else.

The second part of this thought is found in verse 24. The word "wealth" is not mentioned in the Greek text. It reads "let no man seek his own, but that which is of another". The word is referring to everything that pertains to another's comfort, usefulness, happiness, or salvation.

In other words, put the other man's feelings in front of your own so you do not offend him and he is edified by you.

1 Thessalonians 5:11

11 Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

In this passage the Thessalonians were being told to comfort one another. One of the greatest blessings we have is the gift of togetherness. When we are going through a difficult time it is good to know that we are not alone. People that are not Christians often have to go through their difficult times all alone.

Hebrews 10:24

24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,

Jude 20

20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit,

Another great gift we have is the power of prayer. We have a direct line to God through the Holy Spirit. Christ is our mediator. This should be a great source of comfort for us.

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Edification at the Church Level

The church plays an important role in edification. Coming together to study the Bible keeps us on the same page. It keeps us from being tossed here and fro.

How Does the Church Edify

It is hard to be edified when you stand alone. We need to feed on each other's passion, each other's knowledge, and each other's strength.

There is a reason that we meet on Sunday mornings. There is strength in numbers. Let us look at some of the reasons we meet:

- To worship God;
- To partake of the Lord's Supper;
- To teach and be taught;
- To sing songs; and
- To build one another up (edify)

To Worship God

We are commanded to assemble ourselves together. We are told in **Matthew 18:20** that *“For where two or more are gathered in My name, There am I in the midst of them”*.

This was a departure from the Jewish law. They believed that a number less than ten was not a church. This shows that if two or more meet to worship that Jesus will be in the midst of them. This is a comforting thought. Just knowing this should edify us.

Hebrews 10:25

25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

We are commanded to attend services so that we can exhort/edify one another. Meeting together builds a bond. When you do not attend, it is like a piece of the puzzle missing. The church is not complete.

To Partake of the Lord's Supper

Jesus instituted what we know as the Lord's Supper in **Matthew 26:26-29**:

26 Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." 27 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, 28 for this is my blood of the[a] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

Coming together on the first day of the week to remember the death of Jesus for us, and continuing to do so until He comes again, is a form of edification.

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To Teach and Be Taught

There are a lot of reasons that we should attend worship studies. In **Acts 2:42** we see that the early Christians devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

The early church was very zealous and desired to learn the truth.

1 Corinthians 14:12

12 Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.

This thought begins in verse 11. It is speaking of the gift of speaking in tongues. One of the gifts that could be imparted during the early days of the church was the ability to speak to men in languages that were unknown to the speaker. He spoke as the spirit gave utterance in the language of the audience he was speaking to. Paul says that if the speaker is speaking in a tongue, and no one understands it, the group is not being edified. Worship services should be conducted in a manner that everyone can understand and participate in.

Paul went on to say in verse 26 to let all things be done for edification.

1 Corinthians 14:26

26 How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

Paul told the church in Ephesus to "Edify itself in love". Someone might be speaking in tongues. Someone else may be interpreting what is said. Someone

else may be prophesying. The idea here is to do things decently and in order. People should not be talking at the same time and talking over each other. This just makes things confusing and no one will be getting anything out of it. One person should present his gift and sit down. The next person would present his gift and sit down so that the entire group is benefited (edified) by the experience.

We all know how aggravating it is when we are trying to worship, maybe during the Lord's Supper, and something is going on around us that distracts us. Maybe it is a child that is out of control or playing, maybe a baby is crying, or any number of things. That is what Paul is talking about here. It is hard to be edified when there are too many things going on around us.

Ephesians 4:11-15

¹¹ And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; ¹² For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: ¹³ Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: ¹⁴ That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; ¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: ¹⁶ From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

This passage talks about the establishment of the church. Before Jesus left He gave various gifts to people that would lead the church for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of ministry, and the edification of the body of Christ. As long as order is maintained in the church, and everyone does their part, the church will be edified and will grow.

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Ephesians 4:16

¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

The edification of the church is accomplished by the teaching and preaching of the word of God. When Christians are taught from the word of God what their

responsibilities are, they are edified, or built up. When the entire church works together and everyone does their part it is a pleasure to go to church and everyone is edified by being there. When you have people that are not doing their fair share, it does just the opposite. The body has to work together. Can you imagine if your left leg grew twice as fast as your right leg? Or, if you get up to move and one leg refuses to do its part? You would not walk very well under either one of these conditions. Suppose you were hungry and your hands refused to pick up a fork to feed you? The whole body would suffer. Eventually, the entire body might die. But when all of the parts work together, the brain tells you to get up and go to work to earn a living. The eyes show your body how to get there. Your legs take you there. The arms and hands do the work. The body working together earns a living and is able to support itself. It has food, clothing and shelter. The entire body is happy and grows in harmony. The same holds true for the church.

People notice when you do not come to church. People notice when you do come and you are always late. People notice when something needs to be done and you never volunteer. People notice when there is a work-day and you don't show up. People notice when it is the same people that have to do everything. This can cause hard feeling even if they are never expressed. Every member should make it a point to be active and participate in the work of the church. There is something that we all can do. Don't be a coat-tail rider.

Hebrews 10:24

24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,

To Sing Songs

Singing is a great form of edification. Everyone loves to sing. Singing together just makes you feel good. When you sing, you build each other up. However, singing in church is actually commanded.

Colossians 3:16

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Ephesians 5:18-19

18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,

So we see from these passages that singing is a very important part of our worship service.

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To Build One Another Up

Going to church and being around like-minded Christians is extremely edifying. Let us look at some passages that confirm this.

Romans 14:19

19 Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

The church in Rome was having some issues regarding eating meat and observing certain days. This was affecting their ability to get along. Paul is telling them to not dwell on these things but to work on finding common ground so they could edify each other.

Romans 15:2

2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.

The word “neighbor” here is often used to describe the members of the church. However, it is also used in the global term to mean those living around you. Our job is to please our neighbor for the saving of his soul. People around us take note of our actions and our meekness. We can cause them to want to be around us and be a part of the happiness we have.

Ephesians 4:12

12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

This scripture is talking about the gifts that were bestowed upon certain individuals. Those that were given these gifts were to edify the church. One cannot be edified unless they are in attendance.

I Thessalonians 5:11

11 Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

This passage is talking about the church staying together and staying vigilant until Christ returns. We are to take comfort in being around each other until we die or Christ returns.

We can see from these examples that going to church build us up.

It is interesting to note that in all of these incidents of edification we have reviewed in the scriptures, none of them directly mention giving someone money or paying their bills.

We also do not see any examples of social activities taking place during the acts of edification we reviewed.

We have to be very careful when we say that benevolence is an act of edification.

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Discussion Questions

1. What is the primary work of the church? _____

2. Would the church continue without evangelism? _____
3. What does the word edification mean? _____
4. Do you think that edification is a part of benevolence? _____
5. Should we provide edification to non-Christians? _____
6. Is attending services a part of edification? _____
7. Is edification the work of the church or the individual? _____
8. Is singing a form of edification? _____
9. Name some of the things that we do during services to promote edification.

Additional Notes:

Benevolence / Benevolent Works

There are several passages in the New Testament that address the idea of benevolence. We are only going to look at one right now and will look at the rest of them as we work our way through this study.

Romans 15:25-32

²⁶ For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.

We have now identified the three main functions of the church. This study is intended to thoroughly explore the subject of benevolence. This is probably the most in-depth study ever undertaken to try to fully understand when benevolence is appropriate, when it is not, and who is responsible for it.

The subject of church benevolence, and how the church should distribute or use its money, has long been a source of anguish and controversy in congregations all over the country. We all believe that we should be good stewards of God's money. A steward is a person who manages another's property or financial affairs. They actually do not own the property or money that they have charge over. This is important to remember as we examine this subject.

The word "benevolence" is not mentioned in most versions of the Bible. The American Standard, The New King James, and others make no mention of the word. It is used once in the King James Version in **1 Corinthians 7:3**. In this case it is being used to describe the marriage relationship. The Kings James reads:

³Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband.

Other versions use the word "affection" instead of "benevolence".

As we get started, it is probably best to take a moment to look at the definition of the word 'benevolence'.

Benevolence Defined

Merriam-Webster defines benevolence as:

1. Disposition to do good
2. a) An act of Kindness; b) A generous gift.

The King James Bible Dictionary defines benevolence and benevolent as:

benevolence

BENEV'OLENCE, n. *L. benevolentia, of bene, well and volo, to will or wish. See Will.*

1. The disposition to do good; good will; kindness; charitableness; the love, of mankind, accompanied with a desire to promote their happiness.

The benevolence of God is one of his moral attributes; that attribute which delights in the happiness of intelligent beings. "God is love." 1 John 4.

2. An act of kindness; good done; charity given.

3. A species of contribution or tax illegally exacted by arbitrary kings of England.

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benevolent

BENEV'OLENT, a. *L. benevolens, of bene and volo.*

Having a disposition to do good; possessing love to mankind, and a desire to promote their prosperity and happiness; kind.

While the Bible does not use the word "benevolence" throughout the inspired books, there are many passages that require us to act in ways that meet most of these definitions.

As we strive to live our Christian lives and comply with the scriptures on the subject of benevolence, we are faced with questions such as:

- What is the difference between individual and church responsibility?
- When and to whom does the church offer assistance?
- When is benevolence withheld from the Saints?
- Is the church required to verify the legitimacy of the request?
- Does the church have any responsibility as to how the assistance is used?
- How much should the church offer as assistance?
- How does the church handle the distribution of support? and
- What are the individual requirements to help the needy?

This study will address each of these questions and explore what the scriptures have to say regarding each of these questions.

This study is being written as an apologetic on the use of church funds for the needy. The word apologetic has taken on a new meaning from the way it was originally used. The original definition of apologetic simply means a "defense".

This simply means that we intend to give a defense or state the reason why we as Christians do the things we do when it comes to the distribution of the Lord's money or our own money.

This issue seems to be more prevalent in the Church of Christ than it does anywhere else. Our society as a whole has become more liberal over time and our country has become more of a welfare state than it was in times past.

People have become more tolerant of those who are unwilling to support themselves when there are things that these individuals could be doing to make themselves a productive member of society.

Sometimes the Church of Christ is looked at negatively or gets an undeserved reputation as being hard hearted or uncaring because they do not hand out money to anyone and everyone that asks. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Church of Christ is one of the most compassionate and benevolent groups of people found anywhere. But, it must be under the right circumstances.

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It should be noted that God never intended for benevolence to be used as a tool to bring people into Christ or to keep them faithful.

You can pay people to come to church, but you can't make them participate in sincere worship. You can have five star dining and you will fill the auditorium with people willing to listen to a preacher, or anyone else for that matter, for an hour knowing that they are going to be rewarded afterwards by a good meal. Jesus had this same problem after he fed the five thousand. The people flocked to Him and would not leave Him alone. He told them in John 6:26 that they followed Him not because they had seen the miracles, but because they had eaten the loaves and were filled.

Since this seems to be such a controversial subject, we will try to examine all aspects of the subject and see exactly what the scriptures have to say by looking at the passages listed in the New Testament that deal with benevolence and see what conclusions can be drawn. These scriptures will be presented as accurately as possible. No liberties, distortions, or misquotes will be taken with the text.

It is important as you undertake this study that you have an open mind. You will not be able to objectively see both points of view if you enter into the study with a preconceived opinion.

Samuel G. Dawson wrote a booklet titled "Benevolence". In it he listed four possible attitudes one might have when studying the subject. [1]

1. "I know what I believe, and you are not teaching it".
2. "I know what I believe, and God's word must fit".
3. "How can I get around this teaching and still be pleasing to God?"
4. "We might have the attitude of Samuel in I Samuel 3:10, "Speak; for thy servant heareth".

Note: The first three bullets list the wrong attitude for someone wishing to comply with the word of God. The fourth bullet exhibits the proper attitude that we should have as we study the scriptures.

In the beginning there was only one church. Now there are so many denominations people ask "how do I know which one is right"? Every denomination can be traced back to its roots. One only has to look at the date the denomination was established and who established it to find out which one is right or wrong. The Christian Church was established on the day of Pentecost as detailed in Acts 2. Every other denomination was established either because the people did not want to live according to the scriptures so they started their own religion, or, the denomination is classified as a cult.

Unfortunately, there is division and misunderstanding within the Churches of Christ on a variety of subjects. Splits occur within the church when one group feels differently than another group. Both sides want to prevail. Hurt feelings and a splintering of the group happens when the two sides refuse to put their personal feelings aside and take an honest unbiased look at what the scriptures say.

"Christians" tend to be compassionate, and, as a result, givers. There are many examples in the Bible of people doing good deeds for others whether the recipient was a Christian or not. Church benevolence is always directed at Christians that met certain qualifications.

We read in **Galatians 6: 9-10:**

⁹ Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. ¹⁰ So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

This chapter was written to the Christian brethren to instruct them in their duty and love for one another. As the chapter proceeds, we see that the Christian is to always do good. Our first duty is to those of the household of faith, but that does not mean that we exclude others. The term "as we have opportunity"

implies while our life lasts. God has blessed us beyond measure. He gives us chances to help others and demonstrate how a Godly person lives.

Then in **Hebrews 13:16** we read:

¹⁶ And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

The Jews were in a desperate condition at the time of this writing. The people were to entertain strangers that were both strangers to the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to them personally. We are not to tell someone to depart and be filled but not give them anything to eat. That is only lip service. When we give according to our power of our very means, we sacrifice, or part with our own possessions. We are not greedy. God is pleased when we do such things.

The lines seem to get blurred between collective (church) and individual responsibilities.

This cuts right to the heart of most misunderstandings. People seem to think that the church and the individual are considered equally when it comes to benevolence in the Bible. We will look at this in more detail shortly.

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As you start to read this study you might ask, does it really matter? After all, we are just trying to do good and please and glorify God.

We are told in **2 Timothy 2:15** to rightly divide the word of truth. *¹⁵Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*".

This means when we come before God on the Day of Judgment we will be approved or rejected based on how we divided the word of truth.

We are warned in **Galatians 1: 6-9** not to pervert the gospel; *⁶ I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, ⁷ which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed*". We read in **Proverbs 30:5-6**, *⁵ Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. ⁶ Do not add to His words, Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar*". Lastly, we read in **Revelation 22: 18-19**, *¹⁸ For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to*

these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; ¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book”.

As you can see from these passages, we have a great responsibility to study the words that God gave us and ensure that we rightly divide them. We must strictly adhere to the commands and examples of the New Testament. Personal feelings or beliefs have no place in the interpretation of the scriptures.

We walk a fine line every day in our Christian lives as we strive to please God, be a good example, and lead others to Him. There are people that prey on Christians and are willing to take as much from them that they are willing to give. They know all of the right things to say to tug on your heart strings and portray themselves as victims that need your help. If you are not careful, you can be swindled to give more than you can really afford and to someone that is not really deserving of it. God does not expect you to be gullible.

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We read in **Deuteronomy 15:7-11**:

⁷ “If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; ⁸ but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks. ⁹ Beware that there is no base thought in your heart, saying, ‘The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,’ and your eye is hostile toward your poor brother, and you give him nothing; then he may cry to the Lord against you, and it will be a sin in you. ¹⁰ You shall generously give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all your undertakings. ¹¹ For the poor will never cease to be in the land; therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.’

This is one of those situations where you need to know the background story. The Israelites had a law for the relief of poor debtors. There was a law under the Old Law that every seven years the ground rested from being tilled and servants were discharged from their services. In other words, you could not plant anything to allow the ground to recover. They did not have the fertilizers and means to replace the nutrients in the soil that we have today. God, in His infinite

wisdom, declared that every seven years the land got to rest and regenerate its nutrients.

Since the people were not able to plant crops and sell their produce, there was another act of grace written into this law. That was that all debts owed were forgiven. If you had borrowed money and had not repaid it by the “year of rest”, your debt was written off. This debt was completely written off. It wasn't just suspended for a year. It was a total forgiveness of the debt.

If you were able to repay the debt after the year of rest you should pay it as a matter of conscience, but if you did not your creditor could not recover it under the law.

It is also important to note that this law only applied to the Israelites. An alien could not take the benefit of the law. The Israelites were God's people and as such received the benefit of God's grace. Non Israelites received no grace.

Because of this rule, the money lenders would sometimes be reluctant to lend money to people because it was almost the year of rest. If someone came to a rich man or a lender in the middle of the sixth year and wanted to borrow money, but could not repay the debt before the seventh year rolled around, they often would not lend the money to the poor because they knew they would not get repaid. When the seventh year rolled around, they would end up having to write off the debt.

This put the poor in a bad spot. They needed money and no one would lend to them.

There seems to be certain limitations to the law.

1. The debtor was an Israelite;
2. He did not borrow for trade or purchase, but for the subsistence of his family, and that he could not repay it without reducing himself to poverty and having to flee to another country for relief; because this might be a temptation to revolt from God;
3. The law was not that the creditor should not get repaid if the debtor, or his family or friends could pay it; You should not go borrow money near the year of rest knowing that the debt would be forgiven and you could just keep what you had borrowed for free.
4. But, if no one could repay the debt, he could not exact it by the legal process.

The reasons for this law were:

1. To put honor upon the sabbatical year. Because it is called the Lord's release. That was God's year for their land, as the weekly Sabbath was God's day for themselves, their servants, and cattle.
2. Just as the resting of the ground, and the release of debts, God would teach them to depend on His providence.
3. The year of release typified the grace of the gospel, in which is proclaimed the acceptable year of the Lord, and by which we obtain release of our debts, that is, the pardon of our sins, and we are taught to forgive injuries just as we hope to be forgiven of God.
4. It was to prevent any Israelite from falling into extreme poverty. God was looking out for His people.

Verse 8 tells us not only to stretch out our hand to the poor, but to open our hand wide and lend to him sufficient, or liberally.

Verse 9 warns against refusing to lend because the year of release is at hand and the lender says to himself I will not lend what I am sure to lose. We see that the poor brother will cry to God about his plight and your refusal to lend to him, and it would be a great sin to the lender.

Verse 10 commands us to give cheerfully whatever we give in charity. It says our heart will not be grieved when we give because the Lord will bless us in our work.

When we have an occasion to charitable lending, if we cannot trust the borrower, we must trust God and lend to the person hoping for nothing again in this world, but expecting that it will be recompensed in the resurrection of the just.

We read similar verses in the New Testament. Let's look at Luke 6:34-35.

Luke 6:34-35

³⁴ And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵ But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.

Luke 14:14

¹⁴ And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

Isaiah 58:10-11

¹⁰ And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day: ¹¹ And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

Verse 11 of Deuteronomy 15 says that the poor will never cease to be in the land. And then in verse 12, the people were commanded to freely open their hand to their brother, to the needy and the poor in their land.

Matthew 26: 6-11:

⁶ Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, ⁷ There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat. ⁸ But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? ⁹ For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. ¹⁰ When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. ¹¹ For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. (NKJ)

Jesus was not being insensitive toward the poor. He recognized that human nature being what it is, that there will always be poor people due to a wide

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range of reasons from laziness, drunkenness, bad luck, etc. No economic system can survive in a world where money is given to those who do not work for it. Human nature being what it is causes those that do work to question why they are working so hard for so little when those who are not working are getting handouts nearly equivalent to their own. As a result, they stop working and go on the hand out system. As more and more do this, the system spirals out of control and eventually collapses.

Jesus took this time to defend the woman for doing a well-meaning act of love for Him. He said she did it for His burial. He went on to say in the following verses that if that expensive ointment were to be poured on a dead body, as was their custom, no one would have criticized her for it. The woman wanted to do something for Jesus that He would enjoy while He was still with them.

There will always be opportunity for us to do good things for others. That doesn't mean that we should begrudge someone when they do something nice for another person when maybe we would not have done so the same way.

Paul said in **2 Thessalonians 3: 8-15**:

⁸ Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: ⁹ Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. ¹¹ For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. ¹² Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. ¹³ But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. ¹⁴ And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵ Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. (JKV)

Unfortunately, the church is not immune from having people that do not live up to the gospel. In this case, there were some of the Thessalonians who were walking disorderly and not following the teachings of the apostles. Paul called out the ones that were idle, or not working. It seems that these “idle” people were also busybodies. A busybody is not someone that is constantly working. A busybody is someone that involves themselves, or meddles, in the affairs of others. This is usually unwelcomed and uninvited. Often the object of the busybody is unaware that they are being spoken about by the busybody. These people can be very damaging because they make assumptions that are untrue in a lot of cases.

You might ask, what has being a busybody got to do with benevolence? A lot of busybodies become so because they have too much time on their hands. If they spent more time working, they would have less time for gossiping. We have all heard the old saying “idle hands are the Devil's workshop”.

The Bible does not have anything good to say about busybodies. In fact, it is quite the opposite.

This passage, 2 Thessalonians 3:11, 1 Timothy 5:13-15, and 1 Peter 4:15 all talk about these people. They can be very destructive to the unity of the church.

1 Timothy 5:13-15

¹³ And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not. ¹⁴ I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully. ¹⁵ For some are already turned aside after Satan.

Paul was concerned about the young widows in the church. He wanted the young widows to remarry, bear children, and take care of the house. In others words, stay busy. He equates the young widows having too much time on their hands as an opportunity for Satan to take hold of them. He said specifically in verse 15 that some of the young widows had already turned aside after Satan.

1 Peter 4:15

15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.

These are pretty poignant words for members of the church. It is interesting that busybodies are grouped into the same company with thieves and murderers. People that refuse to work and live off of the good nature of Christians are in danger of being labeled as a thief. One definition of a thief is one that steals stealthily or secretly, or one that commits larceny.

Whether it is the church or the individual doing the giving, we have to determine the sincerity of the need and set boundaries.

Having read this far, let us take a look at some discussion questions.

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Discussion Questions

1. What does the word apologetic mean? _____
2. What is your definition of benevolence? _____
3. How many times is the word "benevolence" mentioned in the Bible? _____
4. Please list those scriptures. _____
5. In what context is the word "benevolence" used in the Bible? _____

6. Before beginning this study, do you believe there is difference between the responsibilities of the church as a group and the individual? _____
7. Do you believe that people inside the church have become tolerant of those who cannot or will not work? _____
8. Do you believe that Christians tend to be very compassionate? _____
9. Do you believe that benevolence is a useful tool to get non-Christians to attend worship services where they will hear the gospel? _____
10. Based on this short section, do you feel that it is important to follow the scriptures to the letter, or do you feel that we have some latitude where there is not a "thou shall" or "thou shall not"? _____
11. Can you provide scriptures to support your position? _____

12. What does Galatians 6:9 say should happen to anyone that teaches any other gospel than what you have received? _____
13. What does Proverbs 30: 5-6 say will happen to us if we add to Gods words?

14. What does Revelation 22:18 say will happen to one that adds to God's word: _____
15. What does Revelation 22:19 say will happen to one that takes away from God's word? _____
16. What does it mean for God to take away our part from the Book of Life?

17. Will we be lost if we change, alter, or fail to follow God's word? _____
18. Do you believe that people often approach the church for assistance when they are undeserving of help? This question applies to both Christians and non-Christians. _____
19. Do you believe that Jesus was aware of this? _____

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20. What was Paul's feeling about people that would not work? _____
21. Complete the verse from Deuteronomy 15:7. "If there is a poor man with you, one of your _____, in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor _____;
22. How many times is the word "brother used in verses 7-11? _____
23. How many times do these verses say to help someone that is not a brother?

24. What did Jesus say about the poor in Matthew 26:11? _____

25. What kind of example did Paul and the apostles set for the people in 2 Thessalonians 3:8-10? _____

Additional Notes:

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What is the difference between individual and church responsibility?

When one is reading the scriptures it is important to recognize who the audience is. Sometimes the author may be speaking to a single individual, a group of individuals, or the church globally. It is also important not to take the passage out of context. It is imperative that when looking up a topic in the Bible that you do not just read one verse and think you have found your answer. You must look at the verses leading up to the statement in question and fully comprehend the entire thought process. Failing to do so can cause you to misinterpret what the author was saying. This is why study is so important.

[The “Law of Rationality” holds that “we ought to justify our conclusions by adequate evidence.” Adequate evidence absolutely demands certain conclusions. We are not talking about ASSUMPTIONS. We are not talking about guesses, or speculations, or probabilities, or possibilities. We are speaking of that conclusion which is absolutely DEMANDED by the evidence at hand. And that conclusion which is demanded by the evidence is a matter of KNOWLEDGE.] [iii]

The largest stumbling block for people in the area of benevolence is that they have this belief that when it comes to the work of the church, there is no difference between the church and the individual. Some think that because the church is really the Christians, not the building, anything the church can do, the individual can do. And, anything the individual can do the church can and must do. They cannot see a distinction between the individual Christian's work and the work of the church. That is why it is important that we make this thought process part of this study and deal with it right up front. This study will seek to explore and define this way of thinking as this seems to be the root of the problem.

[The Scriptures teach there is a difference between an individual's money and money that belongs to the local church. Peter's rebuke to Ananias makes this clear: “But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained,

was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God'" (Acts 5:3-4). Before the money was laid at the apostles' feet (given to the church) it belonged to Ananias and was under his control. However, once it was given to the church, it became the church's money to be used in accordance with the instructions given to the church (to carry out the work of evangelism, edification and benevolence for needy saints).

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The devil is the tireless enemy of God and His people. He will use any means possible to destroy preachers, elders and entire congregations. "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:10). Satan used this avenue of temptation as an effort to harm the church in Jerusalem (Acts 5:1-11). He continues to use it today. Therefore, it is important for God's people to take every precaution to handle His money in an open and honorable manner.] [iii]

It is important to note that the church and individuals exist in different environments.

Individuals live and function in three separate environments:

- Spiritual Environment – which is the church
- Social Environment – which is the home
- Civil Environment – which is the civic or civil government

The church however only exists and operates in the Spiritual Environment.

John 18:36

³⁶ Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

Philippians 3:20

²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

The individual has certain responsibilities with regards to his service to the church, in his home, and to his government. Likewise, the church has certain responsibilities that are spelled out in the scriptures. The two are not the same. This is an important distinction that most people do not understand. They believe that anything the church can do the individual can do and vice versa.

It might be good to spend a moment talking about individuals who do not attend services. I have often tried to talk to people about the church and they tell me that they do not attend services or belong to a church. They say that they believe this is acceptable because they are “spiritual”.

I don't believe that one can be spiritual when they have separated themselves from the body of Christ.

Paul talked to the Galatians on this subject in Galatians chapter 5. He told them that the spiritual Christian is one who walks in the spirit.

But we have to continue to walk in the spirit.

John 15: 1-11

¹ I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. ² Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. ³ Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. ⁶ If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷ If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. ⁸ Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. ¹⁰ If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

So it is obvious that one must remain in the church to be faithful. This is a point that might become important some day when one that has fallen away or is not faithful approaches the church for benevolence. We will discuss this later on in this study.

As I was doing my research on this particular chapter, I came across a study on the same subject by Steve Wallace. It was titled “The Church Versus the Individual”. Some of this work is taken verbatim in some areas. In other areas, I inserted other scriptures. I plan to use his basic framework for this section and make my own general comments and thought provoking questions.

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Why Have Brethren Argued There is no Distinction Between the Church and the Individual? And, What Does the Bible Say About It?

[Answering this question necessitates our reviewing the circumstances that led to our brethren making this argument. During the middle of the twentieth century many brethren started to advocate that local churches should contribute to the establishment, construction and support of such human service institutions as colleges, orphans homes and homes for widows run by brethren. This led others to ask for Bible authority for a church to contribute to such institutions (Colossians 3:17).] ^[iv]

Matthew 18:15-17

¹⁵ Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. ¹⁷ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

[Please notice that one man ("thou hast gained the brother") is not the church. Also, two or three members of a given church are not the church ("two or three witnesses"). The church is the church ("tell it unto the church"). When verse 17 says, "And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church," it clearly shows that the individuals of verses 15 and 16 are not the church. Our brethren say there is no difference between the church and the individual. However, this verse teaches otherwise.] ^[iv]

An individual may tell his brother his fault between the two of them but may not tell it to the church except under certain circumstances.

Look at the following scriptures and determine if the texts is speaking to churches or individuals:

John 15: 1-8

² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

³ You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

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4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

[In an attempt to justify the existence of different denominations, they have argued that Jesus is the vine and the individual branches are different denominational churches. We have correctly noted that the branches are individuals and not churches. **Why is this distinction not made by our institutional brethren in their use of Galatians 6:10 and James 1:27?**] [iv]

1 Corinthians 12:14

14 For the body is not one member, but many." The body is not the hand. The hand is a part of the body, as is the eye (1 Corinthians 12:20-21).

1 Corinthians 12:20-21

20 But now are they many members, yet but one body. 21 And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

[However, the body is not the hand just as it is not the eye. **The members of the body are different from the body as individual links are distinct from the chain!** "Body" is a collective noun as are flock, herd, and school (of fish). The bird is distinct from the flock. The cow is distinct from the herd, and the member is

distinct from the body. The argument that there is no difference between the church and the individual flies in the face of these clear truths.] [iv]

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Let us look at a statement on **Galatians 6:1-10** by Steve Rudd in his work titled "The Pattern of Congregational Benevolence in the New Testament":

¹ Brethren, even if a man [an individual not a church] is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, [an individual not a church] and thus fulfill the law of Christ. ³ For if anyone [an individual not a church] thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴ But let each one [an individual not a church] examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone [an individual not a church], and not in regard to another [an individual not a church]. ⁵ For each one [an individual not a church] shall bear his own load. ⁶ And let the one [an individual member not a church] who is taught the word share all good things with him [an individual preacher not a church] who teaches. ⁷ Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows [an individual not a church], this he will also reap. ⁸ For the one [an individual not a church] who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one [an individual not a church] who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life. ⁹ And let us [each individual not a church] not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we [each individual not a church] do not grow weary. ¹⁰ So then, while we [each individual not a church] have opportunity, let us [each individual not a church] do good to all men [Christians and non-Christians], and especially to those who are of the household of the faith [especially Christians].

In this series of verses, the apostle Paul is clearly speaking of personal responsibilities and not those of the church.

Galatians 6:10

¹⁰ As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

[In light of these facts, one reason for brethren to argue that there is no distinction between the church and the individual is clear: They seek authority for church support of the above mentioned institutions.] [iv]

[A further issue involved in church support of orphan homes is the matter of the church's benevolent responsibilities. As brother Jacobs shows in his article in this

issue of Watchman Magazine, the church is limited to saints in this area. By contrast, as we have noted above, an individual Christian is to follow the example of the Good Samaritan and “do good unto all men” (Galatians 6:10, cp. James 1:27).] [iv]

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Galatians 6:1-10

¹ Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

³ For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

⁴ But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

⁵ For each one shall bear his own load.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

⁶ Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

⁷ Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

⁸ For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

⁹ And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

¹⁰Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

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Ephesians 5:25

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

An individual may love his wife but the church may not do so.

Ephesians 5:27

²⁷ that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

Let us not fail at this point in our study to note the tacit admission made by brethren who obscure the distinction between the church and the individual: They admit there is no scripture for a church to be involved in the support of such institutions as we mention here or in the relief of non-saints. This is why they have tried to obscure the difference between the church and the individual! [iv]

Ephesians 6:4

⁴ And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

Ephesians 6:5,9

Christians owned slaves and were instructed to treat them properly, but the Church was not in the slave business. [iv]

⁵ Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ;

⁹ And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

Philippians 4:15-17

The Church sent once and again to Paul's needs. This was done by the group, not by individuals. [iv]

¹⁵Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. ¹⁶For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. ¹⁷Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.

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[The individual has more liberty than the church in actions and contributions. The Church can only give to that for which it has instruction from the Lord. The Lord has been specific about the work and mission of the Church.] [iv]

[In this fast-changing world of ours, it is perhaps proper to take some time out to think deeply about accuracy of serving the Lord. He might not be pleased if we blur across distinctions and responsibilities that are important to Him.] [iv][v]

Even here, it is not specified whether the Philippians sent to him individually, took money from the treasury, or both. I would suspect that it might have been a combination of both since we saw so many examples in the early church of people contributing to the needs of other saints.

1 Timothy 5:9

⁹Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man,

An individual may support any widow he wants to but the church may only support those meeting certain requirements.

1 Timothy 5:16

¹⁶If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed.

“Any man or woman that believeth has widows” is speaking of the individual Christian. The verse says that the individual Christian has a responsibility that the church does not have. This means that if you have a family member that has lost her husband, you should see to it that she is taken care of. Further, even a casual reading of this verse with the topic of this article in mind shows a difference between the church and the individual to the fair reader. To say there is no difference between the church and the individual clearly contradicts

this verse! This verse clearly states that the church is not to be burdened except as a last resort.

James 1:12, 13, 14, 19-20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, and 27

¹² Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

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¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

¹⁹ So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; ²⁰ for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

²¹ Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror;

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

²⁴ for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

²⁵ But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Is this verse referring the actions of a group or an individual? _____

James 1:27

27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

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[The argument that there is no difference between the church and the individual allows the church to take upon itself the relief of non-Christians and thus, in the minds of some, authorizes church contributions to orphans homes where non-Christian children are aided.] [iv]

This verse clearly shows a distinction between the church and the individual. When the verse reads to "keep himself unspotted", it is clearly referring to a person. The church is the bride of Christ. If this verse were talking about the church it would read to keep "herself" unspotted.

Question:

Is this scripture stating that the church cannot practice pure and undefiled religion? _____

I think we have clearly shown that the church and the individual are not the same. Each has separate duties and responsibilities. Having said that, let us now take a look at the responsibilities of the church and the responsibilities of the individual. We will begin with the responsibilities of the individual Christian.

Responsibilities of the Individual Christian

We are going to spend a few moments looking at the responsibilities of the individual Christian. You might ask, “why are talking about individual responsibilities; I thought this was a study on church benevolence. Isn't benevolence about the church giving money to people?”

The answer is both yes and no. We are going to talk about the church giving money to individuals, but there are requirements to both giving and receiving money from the church treasury.

So, before we look at the requirements associated with the church, let us take a look at the responsibilities the individual has to meet.

Steve Wallace identified five distinct responsibilities of the individual Christian. They were:

1. Gainful Employment;
2. Care of Family;
3. Obedience to Civil Government;
4. Benevolence to the Needy; and
5. Support of the Local Church.

Let's start with Gainful Employment.

Gainful Employment

An individual has a moral and biblical responsibility to work and provide for his family.

We are going to spend a few moments talking about the fact that God intends for people to work. You might ask what this has to do with benevolence. Often the people that seem to keep coming to the church for “help” are people that either do not have a job and can't seem to keep one, or, they do not seem to apply themselves to trying to improve their station in life on their own. Maybe they turn down work that is offered to them because it is not their “dream” job. This actually gets to the heart of the reason for this study. This study will examine whether or not the church is permitted to help those people who are essentially “lazy” people.

The Bible says about laziness and lazy people. The Bible is clear that man is intended to work. In Proverbs 6:6 we read: *“Go to the ant, you sluggard!*

Consider her ways and be wise". Have you ever watched an ant? They never stop for more than just a couple of seconds. They are constantly in motion.

Another passage that I really like is Ecclesiastes 10:18 *"Through sloth the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks"*. We have all seen cases where people stop keeping the maintenance up on their house and it just starts falling down around them.

Acts 20:33-35 – Working With Your Hands

³³I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. ³⁴Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. ³⁵I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Paul sets an example for others to follow. He said that he did not covet anyone's gold or apparel. He said that he worked and supported himself. Paul was very busy trying to get the church off of the ground. I am not sure when he found time to work but he did.

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2 Thessalonians 3:6

⁶Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.

Paul is telling the Christians to avoid anyone *"who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us"*. In other words, those who walk in idleness, meaning lazy or not working, were apparently siphoning off of the others that were working. If we are to "avoid them", then how can we think they would be entitled to support / benevolence? That was not the example that Paul said he and others set for them. We read just a few verses down in verse 10:

2 Thessalonians 3:10

¹⁰For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.

In this case Paul would have been entitled to receive a salary for his work as a preacher of the gospel. He waived this right that he might set an example for them to follow. Paul was pretty direct in telling those that were not working and were living off of others to reform themselves and get a job. The Jews had a

saying that “He who does not labor does not deserve to eat. The laborer is worthy of his meat; but what is the loiterer worthy of”. It is God’s will that all men have a vocation and work at. He does not want us to be a drain on the system. Paul said that they had heard that there were some among them that walked disorderly, were not working at all, and, were busybodies. (v11). What we see here is that there must be work in opposition to idleness; There must be quietness in opposition to busybodies that meddle in everyone else’s business. This was not just Paul’s desire. Paul said Jesus told them to work in quietness and eat their own bread. (v12). We are to continue to do good and not grow weary. But, there comes a point where we see that someone is not willing to work and would rather “live off of the system” as we like to say. We are to note that person and have no company with him that he might be ashamed. We are to send a clear message that God is not happy with them and neither are we. We are not to keep company with him, but we are not to treat him as an enemy. We want them to feel like they can reform and rejoin the group.

God told Adam in Genesis 3:19:

Genesis 3:19

19 In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

Because man sinned, he no longer had a life of ease. He now had to work until the day he dies.

I Timothy 5:8

8 But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

This verse clearly states that any man that does not provide for his own family, including his poor relatives, he has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel. One reason that the rich should maintain their poor relatives is so that the church will not be burdened and the church can assist those that qualify that have no other means of help.

Ephesians 4:28

28 Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

This verse is a caution against those who choose to steal rather than to work and earn the money to get what he needs. Those that will not work are easily drawn into temptation to steal. Laziness often breeds theft. The second half of this

verse points out that men should work so that not only can they support themselves, but they will have abundance to give to those less fortunate. We should be charitable to those that are not able to work.

We can see from these examples that God intends for us to work hard. Jesus believed in hard work. Prior to His ministry, He worked with His father as a carpenter. Jesus also said that His father in heaven, God, also worked. We read in John 5:17 “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work”. We know He was talking about God because in the next verse the Jews sought the more to kill Him because they said He was making Himself equal to God.

John 5:17

17 But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.

The Bible has a lot to say about laziness and none of it is good.

Having explored these scriptures on how God feels about lazy people, we have to be very careful about who we help. Even if the person is a member of the church, if they are turning down work and not trying to help themselves, they may not be eligible for support from the church treasury.

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Discussion Questions

1. Thinking of the scriptures we have just reviewed, would you think that these are individual or group responsibilities? _____
2. Do you believe that anyone that is able to work and support themselves and their family has a Biblical obligation to do so? _____
3. Do you believe that a person's willingness to work should be a factor in receiving benevolence from the church? _____
4. What does Proverbs 6:6 say about the example of the ant? _____

5. What does 2 Thessalonians 3:6 tell us to do with those that walk in idleness and not in accord with the traditions that you received from us? _____

6. What does 2 Thessalonians 3:10 say about the man that would not work? _____

7. What does Genesis 3:19 say about receiving your bread? _____

8. What does 1 Timothy 5:8 say about the man who does not provide for those in his household? _____

9. Does this scripture teach that stealing is a sin? _____
10. Does this scripture imply that if you are requesting support, or for that matter taking support, when you are able to work is a form of stealing? _____
11. Do the scriptures look favorably on those who are lazy? _____
12. Do you believe that preaching the gospel full-time is considered employment? _____

Additional Notes:

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Care of Family

[The Bible also teaches the individual's obligations with regards to his or her family.] [iv]

When we reviewed the definition of benevolence we saw that it meant *the disposition to do good; good will; kindness; charitableness; the love, of mankind, accompanied with a desire to promote their happiness.* We see that care of the family is exactly what benevolence is all about.

When we speak of taking care of the family, we usually think about men. However, that role is not limited just to the man. Women must play an active role in the care of the family as well.

A lot goes into the care of the family. The husband must be a role model for the home. He must show strong leadership. He must love his wife and his children. He must see that they are safe and have a place to stay and food to eat. He disciplines the children when necessary.

Likewise, women have to love their husband and children. They have to be busy around the house ensuring a Godly environment. If the woman has to work outside the home, the husband needs to help his wife with the housework to make sure the home stays in a state of harmony.

If the husband is deceased or has left, the woman should not just sit around and expect the church to support her and her children.

Let's look at some scriptures that speak to these issues.

Proverbs 22:6

⁶ Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

This is one of those responsibilities shared by the father and the mother.

Ephesians 6:4

⁴ And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Fathers are to be supportive, loving and not disrespectful or mean to their children. They should teach their children to be strong responsible Christians.

1 Corinthians 7:3

³ Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband.

As we pointed out, this is really the only time the word benevolence is used in the Bible. The husband and wife are to share intimacy and strong love for each other to ensure harmony in the marriage so that it does not break up.

1 Timothy 5:8

⁸ But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

An infidel is an unbeliever. We know that unbelievers will not go to heaven. This scripture says that a man that does not provide for his own has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel. It is hard to imagine a fate worse than what will happen to an infidel but this verse says there is.

1 Timothy 5:14

¹⁴ I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully.

Here we see that young women are to marry, bear children, guide the house, and give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully. If women do not mind their business, but are gossipers, this might give those that don't like the church a reason to speak against it. As we know from Acts 6, there was talk against the church because the widows were not being taken care of. It was

starting to reflect poorly on the church. It needs to be a legitimate need. We don't want people crying that they are not being taken care of when they are able to take care of themselves.

I Timothy 5:16

16 If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed.

Great care is to be undertaken to ensure that the funds given from the church treasury is not just to those that want it, but those that truly deserve it. That is why there are qualifications to be met. Christians should take care of their own family if they are at all able before the church is charged with their care.

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Discussion Questions

1. When the scriptures tell the father not to provoke their children to wrath and to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, would you say that they are speaking of an individual or group responsibility? _____
2. What does 1 Timothy 5:8 say of the man that does not provide for his own, and especially those of his household? _____
3. When the scriptures tell the young women to marry, bear children, and so forth, would you say that they are speaking of an individual or group responsibility? _____
4. When the scriptures tell men and women to take care of their widows, would you say that they are speaking of an individual or group responsibility? _____
5. Thinking of these scriptures, would you think that all of these commands are individual or group responsibilities? _____

Additional Notes:

Civil Government

We are lucky to live in a nation that is based on Christian principles. One reason for being subject to the higher powers of civil government is so that we learn to be respectful and obedient. One that is a striker and rabble-rouser is likely to be one that would sow discord in the church as well. One that abuses the civil system will probably abuse the benefits of the church. If you are living off of Welfare when you could be working and be a productive member of society, you will most likely have the same mindset when it comes to the church. Let us take a moment and look at what the scriptures have to say about our attitude towards the civil government.

The Bible likewise clearly teaches the individual Christian's responsibility to obey and honor civil government, as well as to pay taxes and other government related expenses. [iv]

Romans 13:1-7

¹ Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. ² Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: ⁴ For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. ⁵ Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. ⁶ For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. ⁷ Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

We know that we are only on this earth temporarily. Until or Lord comes again, the church must coexist on this earth with the civil government. If it does not, and sows discord with the civil government, the civil government could turn against the church and make it harder on us as Christians to openly worship. We remember in Acts 5:5-7 where the Jews got upset with the apostles and formed a mob and got the whole city in an uproar saying "These men have turned the world upside down, and now they have come here". In some cases people would follow the apostles around stirring up a mob everywhere that the

apostles went. This is not good for the reputation of the church. It makes it hard to recruit new Christians when you have a cult mentality associated with you.

Matthew 22:21

21 They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

We know that when the Jews could not refute Jesus with anything else, they tried to turn the government against Him. They eventually did and it resulted in the crucifixion of Jesus. This was just one of the accusations brought against Him.

1 Peter 2:17

17 Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

We see here that we are to love everyone, including the King. Now let us look at some discussion questions.

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Discussion Questions:

1. Thinking about Romans 13:1-7, would you think that these are individual commands, church commands, or both? _____
2. Thinking about Matthew 22:20-22, would you think that "cheating" on your taxes would be considered a sin? _____
3. Thinking about 1 Peter 2:17, would you think that these are individual or group responsibilities? _____
4. Thinking about 1 Peter 2:17, do you think the scripture is talking about only those that are Christians, or all people? _____
5. Why do you think that it is important for Christians to be subject to the civil government? _____
6. Render unto Caesar the things which are _____ and unto God the things that are _____.

Additional Notes:

Benevolence to the Needy

This is where we start to get back into the heart of this study. We have looked at the topic of the individual verses the church. Now we want to look at some scriptures that are directly at individuals.

[Christians are to be involved in general benevolence as they have opportunity.] [iv]

When we face judgement we will have to explain to the Lord how we treated the needy.

The Old and New Testaments say a lot about how we are to treat our fellow man.

Deuteronomy 16:17

17 Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which he hath given thee.

The offering of the Israelites were to be eaten with festivity, shared with their friends, who were also Israelites, and bestowed on the poor liberally and with great generosity so that everyone would be joyful and thankful. It is a lot like our potlucks that we have. Everyone brings a little something and everyone shares the food. No one leaves hungry or has to sit and watch everyone else eat while they do not have anything to eat.

This verse is specifically talking about the feast of the weeks. Three times a year all of the males had to appear before the Lord. They were not to come empty handed. The people were to bring an offering to the Lord. They were not told how much to give, just to give as they were able.

According to Matthew Henry's Commentary, The people were not to come empty handed in token of their dependence upon God and gratitude to Him. And God was not unreasonable in his demands; let every man but give as he was able, and no more was expected.

Do you believe this is an individual or church command? _____

Proverbs 3:27-28

27 Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. 28 Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and tomorrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee.

Proverbs 3 is talking about guidance for the young. Solomon is telling the young men how to act as they grow up. There is a lot of great advice in this chapter, including this verse on helping people in need.

Verse 27 begins with Solomon saying do not withhold good from them to whom it is due. Who is he talking about here? The poor. Who is he talking to when he says when it is within the power of your hand to do it? The rich. The rich are basically stewards that God has given an abundance to. The rich should not be hoarders that watch their fellow man suffer when they can do something about it. Verse 28 says that when someone comes for food or other necessities that we should help them right then. Don't tell them to come back tomorrow or another time. Death may take the person, or even you, before the morrow.

Do you believe this is an individual or church command? _____

Proverbs 14:31

³¹ He who oppresses the poor taunts his Maker, But he who is gracious to the needy honors Him.

God is the one who makes us whether we are rich or poor. It offends the Creator when we neglect the poor as they are His creation also. If we are gracious to the poor the Lord is pleased with us.

We will see in other scriptures where the world is full of poor people. There was in that time, and there is in our time. The poor will be with us always. God shows mercy to the poor. He who oppresses the poor taunts God, but the person who is gracious to the poor honors God. We saw in the case of the Rich Man and Lazarus, where the rich man watched Lazarus lie at his table every day to eat the scraps with the dogs and the rich man was not gracious to him. We are told that the rich man was dressed in fine linen and lived a life of luxury. We were not told that he was a particularly evil man, other than he had no pity for Lazarus. When they died, Lazarus was taken away to Abraham's bosom while the rich man was taken to Hades to begin his suffering. His lack of pity toward Lazarus taunted God and he ended up in torment. It is a dangerous thing to let a brother or sister suffer when it is within your power to do something about it.

Do you believe this is an individual or church command? _____

Proverbs 19:17

¹⁷ One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the Lord, And He will repay him for his good deed.

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When you do good for anyone, and especially the poor, the Lord is happy with you. Like He said in Matthew 25: 40, *'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'* There is a good parallel to this in 1 Timothy 6:17-19: *¹⁷Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. ¹⁸Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, ¹⁹storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*

This gets to the heart of individual benevolence. You should not shut your eyes and your heart to the needy. The Lord has blessed us beyond measure. If we are ever in a position to help someone we should do so. We should not do it for public praise.

One of the best things you can do is to help someone that cannot do a single thing for you. God sees the things we do in secret and will reward us openly at the right time.

Do you believe this is an individual or church command? _____

Proverbs 21:13

¹³He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor Will also cry himself and not be answered.

This verse is just the opposite of "give and it shall be given to you". If you do not show mercy and benevolence to the poor, you cannot expect to be shown any mercy in your time of need. In Luke 6:38 we read: *"³⁸Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."*

Can you imagine having the ear of the Lord closed against you? That is what this verse says. If you do not listen to the poor when they are crying for help, one day you might be crying for help and no one will be there for you either.

Do you believe this is an individual or church command? _____

Proverbs 22:9

⁹He who is generous will be blessed, For he gives some of his food to the poor.

A righteous man who is blessed will take note of the poor and share his food with them.

Those that are generous and merciful will share with the poor even when they have very little themselves. And for that they will be blessed of the Lord.

Do you believe this is an individual or church command? _____

Proverbs 25:21-22

21 If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; 22 For so you will heap coals of fire on his head, And the Lord will reward you.

Jesus taught that we should love our enemies and be good to those that persecute you. This scripture is not telling us to literally dump hot coals on the head of those that do us wrong. It means that if we are good to those that treat us badly, their conscience will eat on them every time they think about how badly they treated us but we were still good to them.

This same verse is mentioned again in Romans 12:20.

Do you believe this is an individual or church command? _____

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Proverbs 28:27

27 He who gives to the poor will not lack, But he who hides his eyes will have many curses.

God does not like to see those who are blessed ignore those in need.

As with the example of the Rich Man and Lazarus, those that have plenty and do not share with the less fortunate will have many curses. If not in this lifetime, then in the lifetime to come.

Do you believe this is an individual or church command? _____

Malachi 3:10

10 Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

The storehouse was a room in the temple where tithes of crops and animals brought by the people were stored. It was basically the bank or treasury of the temple.

When tithes were unpaid, the priests were deprived and had to give up their ministry and start farming. The nation's religious life was hindered. More importantly, the people were being disobedient and robbing God.

God was telling the people that if they had enough faith to give to Him first, He would pour out such a blessing on them that they would not be able to store all of the grain harvested from their crops.

During this time in the Bible, the people had stopped bringing their tithes to the priests. As a result, the priests did not have enough food to support life, and their services were interrupted.

Do you believe this is an individual or church command? _____

Now let's look at some examples of individual benevolence in the New Testament.

Matthew 5:38-42

*³⁸ "You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."
³⁹ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. ⁴⁰ If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. ⁴¹ And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. ⁴² Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.*

When the Bible talked about "An eye for an eye" it was establishing a standard to limit personal retaliation. It was not authorizing vengeance. This law was designed to ensure that the punishment fit the crime.

The offender suffered the same injury that he had committed. This caused people to think twice before doing wrong or injuring their neighbor. As time went by, retribution became revenge and was often carried to the extreme. In some cases the retribution inflicted more damage than what was done to the victim in the first place. This happened even among the Jews that were supposed to be so religious. The idea of not repaying evil with evil was foreign to those raised under the Old Law. The problem with revenge is that when someone wrongs you and you wrong them back, it fosters hatred and outrage. Neither family would ever be the same again.

That is why the following verses talk about turning the other cheek instead of fighting back. The Lord said in Romans 12:19 that vengeance was His and He would repay. Vengeance is a never ending cycle. As we saw earlier, killing them with kindness heaps coals of hot fire on their head.

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Verse 40 is talking about not arguing over material things. If the Christian is sued in court for their tunic, which is your coat, give him also your cloak, which is a type of overcoat. The coat is the undergarment. The cloak is the more expensive outer garment worn over the tunic. We have confidence that as the Lord said in Romans 12, He will repay the one that did you wrong.

Verse 41 is talking about forced labor. To compel someone is a form of forcing them to do something they may not want to do. In the early times the nobles traveled in chariots that were sometimes carried by slave labor. They would often stop a citizen and tell him to join the group carrying the chariot. They may or may not send someone else that was previously carrying the chariot back. So, they would tell you to carry them a mile with the idea being that in that mile they would “compel” someone else to take your place and you could return.

At other times, a Roman soldier would compel a Jew to carry his armor or supplies for a mile. Simon was compelled to carry Jesus' cross after He could no longer carry it. Jesus is saying that if you are asked to walk with someone in higher authority a mile to go with him for two miles.

The idea of going the extra mile comes from this scripture. “Going the extra mile” proves our loyalty to human authority and shows the good intentions of our heart. We are to do more than what is expected of us.

Verses 39-41 talk about when we are personally wronged.

- Verse 39 is when we are insulted and assaulted.
- Verse 40 is when we have our goods taken from us.
- Verse 41 is when we are forced to undergo toils and inconvenienced.

Verse 42 is talking about not being hard hearted or insensitive towards the poor. The Christian should be willing to lend to those in need. The scriptures say that God will reward us openly for the things we do in secret.

- Verse 42 is about our attitude toward the less fortunate.

Do you believe that these verses are talking about individual or church commands? _____

Matthew 5:43-48

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes

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His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? ⁴⁸Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

People under the Old Law were under the misconception that if you had to love your neighbor you could hate your enemy. Jesus set them straight on this issue. The love for our neighbor should extend to our enemy. You will never convert an enemy by hating him. Jesus points out that God sends the sunshine and the rain to the evil as well as the good. Anyone can love someone that loves them. It takes a “real” Christian to love those that hate you.

Do you believe that these verses are talking about individual or church commands? _____

Matthew 6:3-4

³But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: ⁴That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

When we are giving to the Lord we should do so freely and with humbleness. We should not be making a big show of our contributions such as the people were doing when the widow gave her mite in Luke 21. Our giving should be done in private. God will know of our gift just as Jesus knew that the widow had given all the money she had. When we help someone in need, it is not for public acknowledgement; it is because someone is in need, not a chance to benefit ourselves.

Do you believe that these verses are talking about individual or church commands? _____

Matthew 25:35-40

³⁵for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; ³⁶I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’ ³⁷“Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? ³⁸When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? ³⁹Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ ⁴⁰And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say

to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

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Feeding someone that is hungry is one of the best things you can do for them. To take a complete stranger in and feed them is a true act of love. Naked is a term used in Bible days to describe someone that was very poorly dressed. We might say they were in rags today. Visiting the sick is a very important duty. People often feel alone and scared when they are sick. Visiting them can be very uplifting. Jesus said that when we do that for our fellow man, it is the same as doing it unto him.

Do you believe that these verses are talking about individual or church commands? _____

Luke 3:10-11

¹⁰So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?" ¹¹He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."

The people during this time had become snooty and high minded. They took no notice of the poor. We read where the rich were given the prominent places in the temple and poor were cast aside. Jesus was telling them that they should not expect any kindness from God if they were not showing their own people any.

Luke 6:30

³⁰Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.

This is probably speaking of those times when you had lent someone money. They had debtor's prisons in those days. The point was that if you had lent money to someone, you should not repossess their goods or do them harm if they did not repay their debt to you.

Luke 6:38

³⁸Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

Good things come to those who give if they give with the right attitude. You should not give out of vanity or self-interest, but to truly help someone in need

and for the sake of God. God will not give you any glory if you help someone to be seen of men or to cause the person you helped to be indebted to you. But if you genuinely help someone because you desire to help them, it will come back to you somewhere down the line.

When the scripture says that good measure will be running over and put in your bosom it is talking about the garments people wore at that time. According to Adam Clark's Commentary, almost all ancient nations wore long, wide, and loose garments; and when they were carrying more items than what their hands could hold, they would put them in the folds of their robes much like a woman would do with her apron. Or, someone might take a jacket or other loose fitting article of clothing and fill it up.

This is meant to indicate that if you do something good for someone, it is going to be paid back to you and then some.

Luke 10:30-36

In these scriptures we have the well-known story of the Good Samaritan.

³⁰And 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. ³¹And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³²And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. ³³But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' ³⁶So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"

This is a great example of how a person that is not a Christian can sometimes make someone that claims to be a Christian look very bad. At this point in time, the Samaritans and the Jews did not have anything to do with each other. The Jews considered the Samaritans to be lower in class than dogs. A man that was a Jew was traveling and fell among thieves who beat him and left him half dead. A Priest and a Levite happened along on the same road and saw the man lying there beaten half to death. Instead of checking on him, they crossed over to the other side of the road and walked on by without offering the victim

any assistance. These two men claimed to be very pious. If anyone should have stopped to help a fellow citizen, it should have been both of these men. Yet they did not. Then along comes a Samaritan man who is the sworn enemy of the Jews and sees a man who is a Jew lying in the road severely damaged. Instead of passing him by as his fellow countrymen just did, the Samaritan stopped and bandaged the man's wounds. Then he put him on his own animal and took him to someone that could care for the man and paid the bill.

This was a parable. Jesus used this parable to demonstrate that no matter what your race, nationality, or station in life is, you can take time out of your day to help someone in need regardless of their race, nationality, or station in life.

We saw how Tabitha doing good for people caused many people to be converted to the Gospel. You never know when that person you help may have been looking for spiritual help and did not know what group to look to.

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Luke 12:33-34

³³Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

I have known people that were extremely well off financially that lived like paupers and would not spend a dollar they did not have to. They would not even spend money on themselves much less anyone else. They did not take vacations or spend money for new cars, clothes, or vacations. They died with millions in the bank never having enjoyed it. I always thought, "What a waste". Jesus told the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:21 to sell everything he had and give it to the poor and he would have treasure in heaven. As we know, the rich young ruler went away sorrowful for he had great possessions.

We should not love money more than our fellow man. No matter what our possessions are, they can be lost in an instant. You could be robbed. The bank could fail. The stock market could crash.

But spiritual wealth laid up in heaven cannot be taken from you. Where you treasure is, there your heart will be also is referring to the fact that you can tell what is important to a person by seeing what they are passionate about; what is important to them. People should always be more important than possessions. I have seen good friends, lifelong friends, go into business together and at some

point one friend will get greedy and take advantage of the other like he never knew him. That is truly sad.

Acts 4:32-35

³² Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, ³⁵ and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

This is a perfect example of the right attitude toward giving. The people were of one heart and one mind. They were in a perfect state of friendship and affection. They were in such harmony that they freely shared all of their belongings. When the people were reminded how much Jesus gave up for them the people were inspired to come together to do likewise for their fellow man. They brought all they had and laid it at the feet of the apostles because they trusted them to distribute the goods fairly.

Acts 4:36-37

³⁶ And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, ³⁷ having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Barnabas set the example by selling his land and bringing the money to the apostles. As we know, Barnabas went on to become an important person in the building of the church.

Acts 9:36,39,42

³⁶ At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did.

³⁹ Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them.

⁴² And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.

In these verses we have the example of Dorcas, or Tabitha. It is the same person. We read that she spent her life in acts of kindness and charity. She apparently had a great deal of love for God and her fellow man. We know that

Dorcas became sick and died. Good people die too. Dorcas must have made a lot of coats and garments for the poor. We see that her good deeds caused people to really love her. When she died she left a lot of people sad. You can't buy that kind of friendship. Because of her faith and good works, others came to believe on the Lord. She was truly a benevolent person.

Acts 14:7

17 Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

This scripture is talking about how even when the Gentiles were more or less heathens and not interested in the Old Law, God still showed them divine providence by sending them rain, fruitful seasons, good grass, and fat cattle.

The lesson for us is that we can also help people that are not Christians. The church cannot help them from its treasury, but we can certainly help them individually.

Acts 20:34-35

34 Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. 35 I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Paul sets the example that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Although it would have been okay for Paul to be paid by the church, Paul showed that he was able to work and support himself so he did. Anyone that is able to work and support their own self should do so. We are not talking about preachers. A preacher can be employed and paid by the church. But, this is an example for the members of the early church not to become a drain on society.

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Romans 12:13

13 contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.

We are to relieve our poor brethren according to the power which God has given us. We are to do good to all men, but especially those of the household of faith.

Romans 12:20

20 "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

We should not withhold aid and assistance to anyone in need regardless of how we may feel about them. In the case of the Good Samaritan, the Jews considered the Samaritans as low as dogs. But, the Samaritan helped the Jew that had fallen among robbers. At one time we were sinners and God took care of us. By helping someone that is an enemy we will cause his heart to melt and he may be converted.

Romans 16:1-3

1 I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, 2 that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.

We have the example of Phoebe here to show that there is something that we all can do.

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

6 Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; 9 as it is written, "He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, His righteousness endures forever." 10 Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; 11 you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God. 12 For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God. 13 Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all, 14 while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you. 15 Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

Starting in verse six, sowing is often used in the Bible as a parallel to good works. In Hosea 10:12 we read: *12 Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain*

righteousness upon you. The people understood farming. You can't expect to have a harvest if you have not planted any seed. Also, you will only have as many plants come up as you have planted seed. You can't sow an acre of seed and expect a hundred acres of grain to sprout. Hence, if you sow sparingly, you will reap sparingly. If you plant large amounts of seed, you can expect a bountiful harvest. The same applies to good works. If you do many good works to others you can expect the Lord to bless you bountifully. Also, if are ever in need, people are more likely to help you.

Verse seven talks about now giving grudgingly, or of necessity. The Jew had in the temple two chests for alms. One was for the Old Law required them to give. The other chest was for free-will offerings. The people would give what the Law required them to give but they did not like it; Kind of like we don't like to pay our income taxes in many cases. These were said to pay grudgingly. Others were glad to give their share to the temple and would even pay over and above what was required of them to take care of the poor and needy. Those who only paid what was required of them, and complained about it, were not pleasing to God. But verse seven says that God loves a cheerful giver.

In verse eight, we see that God is able to make all grace abound towards us for every good deed we do. This is a wonderful verse on helping others.

In verse nine we see that the sower now only sows much around his home, or with those with whom he is acquainted, but he sows broadly including strangers. This verse is taken from Psalms 112:9. *9 He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honour.*

The term "horn" in the ancient days meant several things, but was primarily used as a symbol of strength. Kings were often referred to as the horn of a group of people. Animal horns are very strong. They fight with them. Sometimes you will read that an animal will "toss its head" meaning it fought. Horns were also used as instruments. People would blow into them to signify the battle charge. The horn is sometimes used to describe a container such as a horn of oil. So we can derive from this that if we are benevolent to others, we can receive strength, honor, and our horns will overflow with blessing.

Verse ten talks about God giving seed to the sower to plant and to use as food. We don't have a lot of farmers today. Up until the 1960's almost 50 percent of the people in this country were farmers. The miracle of the seed has always been very fascinating to me.

One corn seed will grow one stalk of corn. Depending on the strain of the corn, how you take care of it, and the growing conditions, that one stalk will have between two and four ears of corn on it. Each ear of corn will have between 500 and 1200 kernels of corn on it. The average is 800 kernels. If you have 4 ears of corn on your stalk, that is roughly 3200 kernels of corn for only one kernel planted! That is a 3200 to 1 return on investment. How would you like to be able to plant dollars bills and get that kind of return on your labor? If the farmer put away seeds from his crop until the next planting season he would have food enough to eat, to share with others, and as a seed crop for next year. That is the generosity of God in action. The rest of these verses describe the fact that these blessings are not only for the saints, but are for everyone. God makes it to rain on the sinner as well as the righteous. The miracle of the seed is amazing. Verse fifteen ends with "*Thanks be to God for this unspeakable gift*". It truly is.

But, if you are slothful and do not plant your seeds, you cannot expect to harvest any. And, if you eat your entire crop without putting away some for seed for the next planting season, you are foolish because you will not have seed to plant and will not have a harvest the following year.

I once heard a story that asks you a question. It said that you were traveling through the desert. You are about to die of thirst. You come upon a well with a jar of water on top of it tightly sealed to prevent evaporation. There is a note attached that says the well will produce all of the water you need but you must use the jar of water to wet the seals and prime the pump or it will not give water. It says after you have drunk all of the water you need, do not forget to refill the jar and put the lid on tightly for the next person. The question is, would you pour the water in the pump to prime it, or would you drink the water in the jar and leave? Think about that one for a moment.

Galatians 6:7-10

⁷Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. ⁸For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. ⁹And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. ¹⁰Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

These passages encourage us to do good to all and to be generous to everyone we can.

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A lot of people use this passage to try to demonstrate that the church is to help anyone that asks whether they are Christians or not due to the fact that the Galatian letter was written to the churches of Galatia.

Individual Christians are to take advantage of every opportunity that comes their way, and to do good to any person. Not just other Christians. But, we are to be especially helpful to our fellow Christians. Matthew 5:42 tells us to give to him that asketh of you, and not to turn away anyone that would borrow from you. Of course, this does not mean that we cannot refuse someone that is asking for money that we cannot afford to give, or for illegitimate uses.

This scripture was not addressing the church. If this passage was speaking to the church, the church would be obligated to help non-Christians, or even people in the church that had family which could support them and would contradict 1 Timothy 5 where the church was not to be burdened with Christian widows who have family members that could care for them.

Again, one must not take the scriptures out of context. Look at verses 1-10 of Galatians 6. Ask yourself two questions about each of these 10 verses:

- Is this verse aimed at the individual or the congregation? And
- Is this verse speaking of physical or spiritual help?

Verse 1 – *“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”*

Verse 2 – *“Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”*

Verse 3 - *“If a man thinketh himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.”*

Verses 1-3 are not talking about congregational activities nor are they talking about benevolence. They are addressing where the individual Christian is to help his brother who has sinned. The help given is not physical in nature. It is spiritual help to aid the brother who has been overtaken in fault.

Verse 4 - *“Let each man prove his own work, and then shall he have his glorying in regard of himself alone, and not of his neighbor.”*

Verse 5 - *“Each man shall bear his own burden.”*

Each person is to bear his own burden when it comes to serving God. Then, he can rejoice in his obedience to God. Again, these two verses are individual in

nature and are not talking about congregational activities nor are they talking about benevolence.

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Verse 6 - *"Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things."*

Paul is teaching that those that are taught should jointly participate in all truth taught by the teacher. This is about fellowship. Again, this verse is for the individual and is not talking about congregational activities nor are they talking about benevolence.

Verse 7 - *"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."*

Verse 8 - *"He that soweth unto his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption: but he that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life."*

Verse 9 - *"Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."*

Again, these three verses are individual in nature and are not talking about congregational activities nor are they talking about benevolence.

Verse 10 - *"So then, as we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of the faith."*

All of these verses show the subject of each verse is the individual. That the entire sequence deals with individual responsibility and action cannot be successfully refuted.

Ephesians 4:28

²⁸Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

Those who will not work for the things they need will at some point be tempted to steal in order to meet their needs. People should work so they will be able to meet their own needs and even have a little left over to help others.

1Timothy 6:17-19

¹⁷Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. ¹⁸Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, ¹⁹storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

With great riches comes great responsibility. Money can become like an addictive drug. The more you get, the more you want. You can also fall into the false delusion that you earned this money on your own and forget that God has blessed you in your career. You can become greedy and insensitive towards the poor. There is a big difference in being spiritually rich versus being financially rich. There is nothing wrong with being financially rich as long as you do not let it interfere with your spiritual health or let it harden your heart against those less fortunate. Abraham and Job were extremely wealthy and were favored by God. If God has blessed us financially, we should always be willing to help those in need. Money spent on the needy on this earth will bear interest on your account in heaven.

I Peter 4:10

⁹Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

We should be kind and helpful to our fellow man without complaining about them. It can be inconvenient at times. It can be difficult at times. But, there but by the grace of God goes you. If you have been blessed with earthly or financial goods, share it with those that you see are in real need. This chapter talks about the fact that the Gentiles and the Jews have both received the gospel and are not brothers and sisters. There were some old prejudices that had to be overcome. So a large part of this being hospitable to one another without grumbling was as simple as the Jews being nice to the Gentiles.

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James 1:27 – Undefined Religion

²⁷Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

The word pure here means free of flaws or defects. It is genuine. In order to demonstrate that we are indeed pure before God we must show that we are merciful, kind, considerate, and mindful of the fatherless and the widows of our number. These are typically people that cannot help themselves. We must have the right attitude when we are helping others. We cannot turn a blind eye or a deaf ear, lest we defile our relationship with God.

I John 3:17 – Helping a Brother in Need

17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

We are all brothers and sisters in Christ. How many of us would see our biological brother or sister in need and not help them? We have already seen that one that will not provide for his own is worse than an infidel. Our brothers and sisters in Christ are also our own. To ignore a needy brother or sister shows that the love of God does not abide in us.

Thinking of these scriptures, would you think that these are individual or group responsibilities? _____

Discussion Questions

1. Deuteronomy 16:17 – Every man shall give as he is? _____
2. Proverbs 3:27 – Withhold not good from them to whom it is? _____
3. Proverbs 14:31 – He who oppressed the poor taunts his? _____
4. Proverbs 19:17 – One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the _____, and _____ will repay him for his good deed.
5. Proverbs 21:13 – He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will _____ and not _____.
6. Proverbs 22:9 – He who is generous will be _____.
7. Proverbs 25:21-22 – If your enemy is hungry, give him _____; And if he is thirsty, give him _____. For so you will heap _____ on his head, and the Lord will _____ you.
8. Proverbs 28:28 – He who gives to the poor will not _____, But he who hides his eyes will have _____.
9. Matthew 5:42 – Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not _____.
10. Matthew 6:3 – When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what? _____
11. Matthew 25:40 – Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to the least of these My brethren, you did it _____.
12. Luke 6:30 – Give to every man that _____ of thee.
13. Luke 12:34 – For where your _____ is, there your _____ will be also.
14. Acts 4:32-35 – What did the apostles do with the money that was brought to them and laid at their feet? _____
15. Acts 4:36-37 – What did Barnabas do to set a good example of benevolence: _____

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- 16. Acts 9:42 – What was the result of Tabitha's good works and charitable deeds? _____
- 17. Acts 24:35 – It is more blessed to give than to _____.
- 18. Romans 12:20 – If your enemy is hungry, _____, and if he is _____, give him a _____; for in so doing you will heap _____ on his head.
- 19. One who sows sparingly will also reap _____.
- 20. One who sows bountifully will also reap _____.
- 21. God loves a cheerful _____.
- 22. How many ears of corn will one stalk produce? _____
- 23. How many kernels of corn will one ear typically have? _____
- 24. Galatians 6:10 – As we therefore have opportunity, let us do _____ unto _____, especially to them who are of the household of _____.
- 25. Ephesians 4:28 – Let him that stole _____ no more.
- 26. 1 Peter 4:10 – Be hospitable to one another without _____.
- 27. James 1:27 – Pure religion and undefiled before God and Father is this, to visit the _____ and _____ in their affliction.

Additional Notes:

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Support of the Local Church

[Christians have a responsibility to support the church of which he or she is a member. This support is both spiritually and financially.] [iv]

Hebrews 10:24-25

²⁴And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: ²⁵Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

We all know members that miss a lot of church services. Some rarely, if ever, attend the worship services on a frequent basis. They may show up on Easter or Christmas, or, once in a blue moon, but as a rule, church just isn't that important to them. We are a family. One of the benefits of attending services is that we get to fellowship with our brothers and sisters. We know that everyone in the world can be treating us badly, but when we go to church we will be surrounded by people that care about us. We draw a lot of strength from each other. In the days of the early church when people were being persecuted and killed, the people encouraged each other. If not, the church would have died out. Benevolence can be something as simple as saying "I love you" or "I missed you" to someone. We have a mutual love and exhortation to each other. The more one misses church the easier it is to miss. If you are not plugged in to the energy of the group soon your battery will run down and have no life. Those that miss communion are backsliding. Those backsliding are in danger of apostasy. This means the abandonment or renunciation of a religious or political belief.

Hebrews 10:38-39

³⁸Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. ³⁹But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

This is not a lesson on falling away. However, if you are not attending church as you should, you are not showing benevolence to your fellow brothers and sisters.

Acts 4:34-37

³⁴Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, ³⁵And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. ³⁶And Joses, who by the

apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, ³⁷Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

It was customary in that day for the Jews to call the poor together and let them eat the meat that had been sacrificed. After Jesus and the apostles began to preach the priest of the time became incensed against those that were followers of Jesus and would not let them eat the sacrificed meat. Those that had been converted started to sell their belongings and bring the proceeds to the apostles for distribution to the poor. This was truly a benevolent act. This is a benefit of being a member of the church. If everyone today was a member of the church, you would not have things like soup kitchens and shelters for the homeless.

Philippians 4: 15-16

¹⁵Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. ¹⁶For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. ¹⁷Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.

We do not realize how hard the apostles had it. They never knew where their next meal was coming from. They might be thrown into prison and spend long lonely days, weeks, months, or years there. Often the people in the town were afraid to come visit them for fear they would be thrown into prison. So, they left the apostles in their own despair. You can see that it meant a lot to people like Paul when the church send supplies to them. Paul reminded them that they were storing up points in heaven for judgement day.

Do these scriptures talk about individual actions, group actions, or both? _____

Even when the scriptures seem to be addressing everyone as a group, are the scriptures requiring individual or group efforts, e.g. "...not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is"? _____

Explain your answer: _____

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[When brethren try to mix the responsibilities of the church and the individual they are guilty of misapplying scripture. God has clearly given responsibilities to the individual that he has not given to the church. Also, as we will note later in this article, there are clear, grave consequences to our brethren's reasoning on this matter.] [iv]

Discussion Questions

1. Do you believe that Christians have a responsibility to support their local church? _____
2. Do you believe that supporting your local church is a form of benevolence? _____
3. Are you discouraged when you see family and friends that used to come to services stop coming? _____
4. Do you look forward to attending services and seeing your friends? _____
5. Hebrews 10:25 – Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves _____ as the manner of some _____.
6. Hebrews 10:38 – God said that if a man draws back, His soul would have no _____
7. Acts 4:34-37 – What did the early Christians do to help those who were in need? _____
8. Philippians 4:15-16 – What did the Philippians do for Paul that no other church had done? _____
9. What does apostasy mean? _____

Additional Notes:

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How an Individual Oversees His Money

In this section we are going to take a look at how the individual should feel about the money he or she has been blessed with. If you have a lot of money it can be a blessing or it can be a curse. A lot of it depends on your attitude and your morals.

Money is a tool. Money is neither good nor bad but it can be used in good ways and bad ways. Tools are meant to be used. They are not meant to hang on the wall or sit in a box and rust.

A plow used to turn the soil can bring forth a crop. If it is left in the barn and never used, it is worthless. A mechanic can use his tools to make a living. If he leaves them in the box and does not use them, they are worthless.

In the parable of the talents, the man with one talent was chastised for burying his talent in the ground. He was told that he could have at least put it in the bank and drawn interest on it.

Money is a tangible item. This means that it has physical characteristics. You can see it, feel it, and hold it in your hands.

Money is a medium of exchange. Money is an easy way to get what you need. People used to barter for their goods. If you were a carpenter and made cabinets, you might trade for someone that sold clothing. If someone sold clothing and did not need cabinets, you, as a cabinet worker, would be in trouble. A common currency just makes it easier to get what you need.

Money is inanimate. It has no feelings. It has no say in how it is used. Its use is totally determined by the person that possesses it. The person that owns it is responsible for its use whether for good or for bad. They will be held accountable for how they used it in the day of judgement.

The church has limitations on how it uses its money. Likewise, the individual also has some responsibilities when it comes to managing their money. The one thing we must never forget is what we are told in James 1:17.

James 1:17

17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

We should not become arrogant in our own thinking and begin to believe that what we have in this world is of our own doing. In the next scripture we will see that we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we cannot take anything out with us.

1 Timothy 6:6-10

6Now godliness with contentment is great gain. 7For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 8And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. 9But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

There is an old saying that there is a reason hearses do not have trailer hitches on them. This would be the reason.

Verse 10 is often misquoted as “money is the root of all evil”. That is not what this verse says. It says the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Those that are blessed with wealth should be very careful to not let it rule them. In Luke 16:19-31 we have the story of The Rich Man and Lazarus. This story showed how the rich man had no compassion for his fellow man. His story was contrasted by the story of the poor man who did not have the basic necessities of life. We do not know what was wrong with Lazarus. He was obviously disabled and unable to work because we read that when he died, he went to paradise. Lazy and slothful people are an abomination to God. The rich man who took no pity on his fellow man was sent to Hades and tormented. This example serves as a warning to the rich not to neglect their fellow man.

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Matthew 25:26

26 “But his lord answered and said to him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed.

Romans 12:11

11 Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;

God does not like lazy people. We will discuss this further when we talk about when benevolence is withheld.

Ephesians 4:28

28 Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

We are to labor with our hands so that we can support ourselves and have some for those in need.

Matthew 19:16-28

16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? 17 And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. 18 He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, 19 Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 20 The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? 21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. 22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

This parable has most likely been debated since it was spoken by the Lord. Can a rich person go to heaven? Must a Christian live a life of poverty? Let's take a look at this parable and see if we can come to a mutual understanding.

By reading ahead we see that a young man who was very rich approached Jesus with the most important question that any soul can ask – What do I need to do to be saved?

You notice that the young man asked, what good thing shall I do in order to have eternal life.

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This was a young man that was proud of his wealth and wanted to chip in a few dollars to ensure that he had a spot in heaven. I think he was feeling a little puffed up and thought that he could throw a few dollars at the church and cement his place in heaven. I am sure that if Jesus had told him to put an extra room on the temple or rebuild the altar, the young man would have been happy to do it.

Jesus started out by asking him to do the basics which were essentially keeping the Ten Commandments. The young man said he was already doing that.

Jesus then told him that if he wanted to be perfect, which means complete, to go sell all that he has and give it to the poor.

Jesus must have known that this young man was very rich and had everything that he desired. He lived a pretty religious life in that he kept all of the

commandments. It appears though that he was not a “complete” or “perfect” Christian in that his heart was not right. He was comfortable in his physical life but was lacking in his spiritual life.

Jesus did not tell him that thou shalt have no other gods before me. Jesus evidently knew that the young man worshipped his money. It appears the young man was not in the habit of helping those in need so Jesus called him on it. He told the young man to go sell all that he had and give it to the poor. The young man was not able to part with his money and went away sorrowful. Had his heart been right, he would have gladly sold all that he had and given it to the poor and followed Jesus.

It must have been interesting to see people interact with Jesus when He knew their very thoughts. Jesus knew exactly where the man's weakness was. This is an important lesson for everyone. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all recorded this parable.

The point here is where the young man's priorities were. Mark 10:21 said that Jesus looked at him and loved him. The young man thought that he had already earned his place in heaven by keeping the commandments.

He also thought that his money was enough to get him through this life. He figured his wealth would get him out of any problems that came his way. As such, he did not have the proper perspective on faith in God.

Jesus loved the man and wanted what was best for him. He wanted the man to trust in God not his money. Jesus wasn't just telling the man to give up his money, He was removing the obstacle that was blocking the man's relationship with God. God was not number one in his life and He should have been. We can lose every cent we have, but God will never desert us. Let's read on:

²³ Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. ²⁵ When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? ²⁶ But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. ²⁷ Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? ²⁸ And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And every one that hath forsaken

houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. ³⁰ But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.

What Jesus told the rich young ruler worried everyone. Jesus said that a rich man can “hardly” enter the kingdom of heaven. He did not say that it could not be done. He said that it would be hard. There has long been a debate over the statement that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

Money has a way of corrupting us. It causes us to do things that we never imagined we would do. You see families get destroyed when a loved one dies and the survivors begin to fight over their possessions.

If you are rich enough, you might start to feel like the rich young ruler; that you can buy your way through life. You don't need anyone's help. You forget about God. You get greedy. You would like to help people in need, but if you spend your money you will no longer have it. The fear of losing it causes you to become hard hearted.

Jesus is using the example of the camel going through the eye of a needle to demonstrate that this would be impossible to do under normal circumstances. However, with God, all things are possible. We just have to trust Him.

Jesus said that everyone that has had to give up their families, their possessions, and lost all for Him would be restored a hundred fold in eternity. In the example of Job, he lost everything and God restored him seven fold.

We should never withhold benevolence from someone in need just because we are afraid to part with our money.

As we mentioned earlier, the love of money can split families that really ought to be loving each other. Let's look at another example.

Luke 12:13-21

¹³ And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. ¹⁴ And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? ¹⁵ And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. ¹⁶ And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: ¹⁷ And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? ¹⁸ And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there

will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. ²⁰ But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? ²¹ So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

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In this case someone came to Jesus to get Him to intervene in a family dispute. It seems that one brother, wanted his other brother to divide their inheritance with him. He must have been the younger brother and the older brother was in charge of the estate. Jesus warns the young man against coveting money.

Jesus took that opportunity to tell another parable. He told of a man that was rich and had a really good harvest. He gathered so much that his barns would not hold the harvest. He pondered what he should do about this problem. Then he decided to tear his old barns down and build bigger barns. Then he could sit back, eat, drink, and be merry for years to come.

It never dawned on him that there were probably a lot of hungry and needy people that he could have easily helped once his own barns were full. But he was self-centered and greedy.

This attitude really upset God. As a result, God told the man that he would die that very night. Then He asked man what good is all of his harvest to him now? God told him that the one that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich toward Him is not pleasing to Him.

I find it interesting to see some of the problems that people brought to Jesus. In this case two brothers were having a dispute. The one brother was telling on the other brother to Jesus. Evidently the father was dead and they were disputing the inheritance. Almost like the prodigal son did with his father. Jesus warned the young man about being greedy. He refused to get involved in their dispute.

He went on to tell another parable. He told about a rich man that had a bountiful harvest; so much so that his barns could not hold the fruits of the harvest. The rich man had a problem. His solution was self-centered and greedy. Instead of sharing his bountiful harvest with his neighbors he decided to reward himself by tearing down his barns and building bigger ones. Then he could sit back, eat, drink and be merry. Still, no regard for anyone but himself.

In the parable Jesus said that God spoke to the rich man. I don't know if it was in a dream or directly to him. But God called him a fool. He told the man that his soul would be required of him that very night. He then asked the man how

all of his possessions were going to help him then. I imagine that there will be a lot of rich people that will be asked that question in the day of judgement.

Matthew 25:14-30

The Parable of the Talents

14 For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. 15 And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. 16 Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. 17 And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. 18 But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. 19 After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. 20 And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. 21 His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. 22 He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. 23 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. 24 Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew

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thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: 25 And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. 26 His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: 27 Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. 28 Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. 29 For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. 30 And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The parable of the talents is a complex story. You might say that it is an allegory, meaning there is a deeper or more general meaning in addition to what is

being said in the story itself. We know that the master was going on a long journey. Before he left, he gave each of his servants a large sum of money; each according to his ability. After a while the master returned to check on his servants and his investments. Two of the three servants had managed to double their master's money. But one had taken his talent and buried it in the ground. The master was pleased with the first two but was very wroth at the third servant that only received one talent.

What are the key points of the parable of the talents?

1. The master went away but promised to return.
2. The master left the servants with something of great value. Talents.
3. The master left each servant a different amount of talents depending on their own ability.
4. The master expected the servants to make good use of their talents.
5. When the master returned the servants had to give an account for their actions.

Some of the lessons we can learn from this story and some of the parallels that can be drawn are that the master went away on a long journey but promised to return. A parallel that can be drawn here is that Jesus prepared to go on a long journey in John 14:1-3. In it, He tells His disciples not to let their hearts be troubled. Jesus said that He was going to prepare a place for them and that He would return.

When the master left in the parable, he left his servants something of great value. In this case, it was talents of money. He gave varying amounts of talents to his servants depending on their own ability. When the master left he expected his servants to use their talents wisely and to grow their wealth.

A parallel to Jesus is also contained in these three points. When Jesus was on the earth He taught His Word to everyone that would listen. He offered them a special gift. We read in John 4:10 where Jesus told the woman at the well;

10 Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.

Jesus said that He could offer her a great gift. Jesus did not want her to keep this gift to herself. He asked her to go get her husband and bring him back. She had no husband. Jesus knew this. But the woman did go and brought back the men from the village. It is a terrible thing when we have this wonderful knowledge and keep it to ourselves.

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In the parable of the sower Jesus said that no man lights a candle and then hides it under a basket; but puts it on a candlestick so that everyone could share the light.

Luke 8:16-18

¹⁶No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light. ¹⁷For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad. ¹⁸Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.

When we keep the gospel to ourselves we are hiding it under a basket.

We all have different talents. It might be preaching the word or teaching a class at church. Or, we might just talk to our family and friends. The point is that we all have something we can do spread the message of God.

Ephesians 4:11-12

¹¹ And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; ¹² For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

We sometimes sing the song "Room in God's Kingdom". This is a great song on personal work and benevolence. It lists a lot of things that anyone can do. It could be a kindly deed or just a cup of cold water. This is a great song.

1 Timothy 6:17-19

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-36, we see a classic example of someone, who incidentally was not a Jew, helping someone and paying for it from his own pocket.

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Discussion Questions

1. Does the individual have any responsibility with respect to how he manages his own money? _____
2. 1 Timothy 6:7 – We brought _____ into this world, and it is certain we can carry _____ out.
3. Does God like lazy or sloughful people? _____
4. Ephesians 4:28 – Let him _____, working with his _____
5. Matthew 19:24 – It is easier for a _____ to go through the _____ of a _____, than for a _____ to enter into the kingdom of God.
6. Matthew 25:14-30 – What did the rich man give to his servants before leaving for a long journey? _____
7. Did each man receive an equal amount? _____
8. Was each man expected to produce the same amount? _____
9. Was each man accountable for his actions, or lack thereof? _____
10. Do we have individual talents given to us as Christians? _____
11. Do you believe that there is something that we all can do in service to God? _____
12. Ephesians 4:11-12 - And he gave some, _____; and some, _____; and some, _____ and _____; For the _____ of the saints, for the _____ of ministry, and for the _____ of the body of Christ.

Additional Notes:

Responsibilities of the Church

We have spent a great deal of time talking about the individual requirements of benevolence. We will now look at the responsibilities of the church regarding benevolence.

The church has a much higher standard to meet than the individual Christian when it comes to benevolence. As much as the church would like to help, it must always have biblical authority for what it does.

The individual Christian is to show love and good works toward all as long as it is legal and morally ethical. The church however, must practice restraint when it comes to the distribution of the Lord's money.

Let us look at the following topics:

1. How the church oversees its money
2. How the church spends / distributes its money
3. How the church raises money
4. How the church violates the Biblical pattern

How the Church Oversees its Money

The Elders are charged with the responsibility of leading the church. In Hebrews 13;17 *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.* The Elders must ensure that the church follows the Biblical pattern. They will be accountable for how they lead the flock. The Elders have to do what is scriptural, no matter how emotional the need may be.

The Elders are the leaders of the church. As such, the church funds are overseen by the Elders of the church.

Elders are sometimes referred to as "Bishops" in the scriptures.

Titus 1:7-9

⁷ For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, ⁹ holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

Acts 11:29-30

²⁹ Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. ³⁰ This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

The money was sent to the elders because they are in charge of their flock. They would know how best to use the money and to ensure that it was distributed fairly. This is why it is important to have elders if there are qualified men that desire the office.

In some cases a church may not have elders. This study is not on the eldership. There are a couple of reasons the church may not have elders.

In some cases the church does not want elders even though there are men qualified to be elders. This attitude is contrary to the Biblical pattern shown in many scriptures.

In smaller congregations there may not be enough qualified men in order to have at least two elders. There is no example in the Bible of a church only having one elder. Only having one elder could lead to a dictatorial situation and is to be avoided.

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In other small congregations, there may not be more than one man who desires the office. The scriptures state that the elder must “desire” the office. If there are multiple qualified men and they do not desire the office the matter should be studied, prayed over, and addressed.

Some churches have deacons when there are no elders. There is no Biblical example of this. The deacons report to the elders. If there are no elders, the deacons would have a tendency to become de facto elders.

When there are no elders, the men of the congregation meet and make these decisions.

The only group of men specified to lead the church are the elders. Deacons do not lead the church. Deacons work under the direction of the elders. When there are no elders, the men have to make sure that they follow the Biblical pattern in the decisions they make. Emotion has to be set aside as it can lead the men down the wrong path. Elders are important and should be elected when there are qualified men.

Titus 1:5

5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.

This example shows that Elders should be appointed and are the ones designated to keep order in the church.

If a church has elders, they are responsible for the distribution of the Lord's money. Examples are shown in the following verses, and others not shown here.

Philippians 1:1

Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

Paul and Timothy made a special greeting to the Elders and Deacons in their letter to the Philippians.

1 Peter 5:1-2

*1 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:
2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;*

In this scripture the elders are being exhorted to take good care of their flock and not to be greedy or seek dishonest gain. This example shows that the elders have oversight of the treasury and are being warned not to dip into it for personal gain.

Watching over the church and the Lord's money is serious business. People have often wondered why Jesus put Judas in charge of the money bag when He knew that Judas was a thief. We read in John 12:6 that Judas cared not for the poor, and was a thief that helped himself to the money that he carried for Jesus and the apostles.

I have heard stories of men that were deacons and other trusted men that could not resist the temptation to dip into the money bag of the church. Some churches have quite a bit of cash given every Sunday. It is easy to take cash without being detected. Satan is always working on ways to tempt those in the church. The church must take steps to avoid this temptation on its treasurers.

It is also interesting that Jesus knew Judas was a thief and let him hold the money bag. He could have asked any number of men to hold it, but He chose

Judas. I think this was intentional to show that Jesus was not concerned about money, or laying up treasure on this earth.

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Discussion Questions

1. Does the church have a higher burden to meet when it comes to distributing the Lord's money? _____
2. Who is charged with the responsibility of leading the church? _____
3. What is another term for Elder used in the Bible? _____
4. How many elders must a church have? _____
5. Can a church have deacons if it does not have elders? _____
6. Should the church have elders if there are qualified men? _____
7. Must the elder desire the office and be willing to serve? _____
8. Who must make the decisions for the church, including benevolence, if there are no elders? _____
9. Should the Biblical pattern be the only standard used when it comes to the issue of benevolence? _____
10. How does emotion factor into the area of benevolence? _____

Additional Notes:

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How Does the Church Raise Its Money?

How the church raises its money is a very touchy subject among some people. We are going to spend some time examining this question and try to Biblically answer all of these questions.

The primary and preferred way that the church raises its money is from the contribution of its members. Each church is autonomous. The Church of Christ does not belong or report to a governing body. It does not contribute to or receive money from a governing organization. Each location should be self-sufficient when possible. Any church that is not self-sufficient should try to grow to the point that they can be.

Giving is a requirement and a privilege. God loves a cheerful giver.

Matthew 6:4

4 that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

Romans 12:8

8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

2 Corinthians 9:7

7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

Giving to the church is part of our worship service. We may only do those things that the scriptures authorize us to do.

We have all seen the televangelist on the television pleading for "love offerings" and other forms of money. They encourage you to send in your "prayer request" with your pledge and they will pray for a special blessing or healing for you.

Who can forget that in 1987 Oral Roberts, who was a very famous televangelist, went on the television to say that God had spoken to him and told him that if he did not collect 8 million dollars in the next 3 months that God was going to "call him home". Well, he raised 9 million dollars. People can be so gullible.

I don't know how anyone that proclaims to be a gospel preacher can play on the heart strings of their members, many of which are very poor and on fixed incomes, and talk them into sending in money that they do not have. Some of these elderly members will send in their power or rent money to these millionaire

charlatans that live in expensive homes and make millions of dollars per year. Have they no heart at all; evidently not.

They also prey on people that are very poor and or have terminal diseases that cannot be cured by modern medicine by making them believe they can heal them. Once again, the prayer request should be accompanied by a generous donation. These people do not understand that the kinds of miracles performed by Jesus and other have ceased.

It has gotten to the point of laughable to watch these “performers” in action. It is time to put an end to the high pressure, deceptive, unbiblical, gimmicky practices that grieve God and hurt the cause for Christ. Don't purchase prayer

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bracelets, head bands, prayer beads, and other items that only enrich the sellers.

Preachers that promise “healings” and other answered prayers if you send them money are blaspheming God's name and hurting the church.

We also remember that Jesus took a whip and ran the money changers out of the temple for taking advantage of the Jews coming to make sacrifice.

We recall the account of Simon the sorcerer in **Acts 8:14-21**. Simon went to the apostles and tried to “buy” the ability to impart the gift of the Holy Spirit on people because of his greed. Peter rebuked him sharply and told him in verses 20-23:

²⁰ But Peter said to him, “Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. ²² Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.”

As well intentioned as we may be, we must recognize that Christ has authority over the church, **Matthew 28:18**.

¹⁸ And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

Giving Begins at the Local Level

According to the scriptures, every Christian should be “added” to the church and should financially support the work of their local church. We have looked at this already and will do so again before we are finished with this study.

The first thing we need to recognize is that contributing on the first day of the week only applies to Christians. There are no examples of non-Christians contributing money in the New Testament church.

It is sometimes a good idea when the collection is about to take place for the person officiating at the table to actually make a statement to the effect that *“we take this time in our worship service to allow our “members” to fulfill a commandment to lay by in store on the first day of the week. This is not intended to be a solicitation of money by our guest or non-members of the church”*. I tend to do this when I notice that we have visitors in the audience. I always hate to see visitors that I know are non-members get that look on their face and they go for their wallet and start fishing around for something to throw

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in the basket because they feel like this is something they have to do. That is not the case.

There is the age old question of how much to give. We are told in **1 Corinthians 16:2** to lay by in store as God has prospered us. In **2 Corinthians 9:7** we are told to give as we have purposed in our heart. The local church is pretty much totally dependent on its local members to fund its own work. There are situations where the local church may be too small to support itself. For example, it may not be able to pay a full time evangelist. It is possible in this situation that other churches may send financial support for the evangelist.

Members need to understand that they have a duty to the church to give the proper amount. There are members that give more than they can really afford to, such as the widow's mite, and others that do not give enough when they can afford to.

Members need to determine what they are going to set aside each Lord's day from their paychecks. This is what you have purposed in your heart. You then need to give that amount every week. You should not wait until the collection basket comes around and decide what you are going to throw in based on what you have in your wallet. Nor should you spend the amount that you have purposed for the church during the week on something else so that you are not

able to contribute the proper amount come Sunday. Your contribution should be a part of your budget, not an afterthought.

I recognize that this is a very sensitive subject for some. Most people do not like to talk about it. It should not be a sensitive subject, or taboo to talk about. It is a part of our worship service!

Having laid the groundwork, let's look at some examples of how the church raises its money.

Gifts From Members

There are examples in the Bible where the members gave above and beyond what would normally be given as routine contributions. The examples included funding the work of the apostles and helping other brethren that were going through difficult times.

It is not unusual for a member to make an extra contribution or even a large gift of money. This may be because the member incurred some sort of cash windfall or it may be that the church has an immediate need. This could be for an addition to the church building or for some other work the church is undertaking. At any rate, it is good when the church has a need and there are members that can supply the demand. This was the case in the following verses.

Acts 4:34-37

³⁴Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, ³⁵And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. ³⁶And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, ³⁷Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

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We see here that there is not only a difference between the individual and the church; there is also a difference between the individual's money and the church's money! Once again, the reasoning that there is no difference between the church and the individual does not square with plain statements of scripture.

Acts 5:3-4

³But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? ⁴While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

Before the land was sold, it belonged to Ananias and Sapphira, not to the church (**1 Corinthians 16:1-2**).

After the land was sold, the money received as price for the land belonged to them. They then took a portion and *"laid it at the apostles' feet"* (the treasury of the church, **Acts 4:34-37**).

Estate Planning

It is not uncommon for people to leave all or a portion of their estate to the church.

There are many examples of brethren selling their land and giving the money to the work of the church. I know of several personal examples of people leaving their homes, and even endowments to be used to spread the Gospel. Sometimes the money is left for a specific use and other times money is just left for the church to use as the elders see fit.

Give As Prospered

We previously touched on this subject. There is often confusion for people regarding laying by in store on the first day of the week as God hath prospered him. Some people get paid weekly while others are bi-weekly or monthly. The question is whether or not you have to give on the first day of the week that you did not get paid. I would propose that if you did not prosper you would not have anything to give. You could either give your "purposed" amount on the weeks that you do get paid or you could set aside something for each week when you get paid and contribute weekly.

1 Corinthians 16:1-2

¹Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. ²Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.

Giving as we have been prospered is the primary way the church funds its work.

Give as Purposed

2 Corinthians 9:6-7

⁶But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

Under the Old Law, everyone had to give 10%. There is no such requirement in the New Testament church. Each Christian should examine his or her financial situation and determine what their contribution will be. Some will give more than 10% and some will give less. This study is not about how much one should give. But, whatever you “purpose” or “determine” to give, you should do so each and every time. You should not give grudgingly or of necessity because if you do not give cheerfully, your gift will do you no good.

Malachi 3:8

⁸Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.

This is a good passage for people to read. Especially for those that think giving is no big deal. This verse shows how important giving really is. When you do not purpose to give to God, or you do not follow through on your purposed amount, you are really robbing God.

This portion was not written to shame you into giving each and every Sunday, and to give more than you should. If you are not giving cheerfully and feel like your giving is a burden, you might as well keep the money because it is not doing you any good. If you trust in the Lord and have faith, things will always work out for you.

Give On the First Day of the Week

In addition to being told how to give, we are told when to give. We read in **Acts 20:7** that the disciples came together on the first day of the week to break bread. This is where we find that Christians no longer kept the Sabbath but worshipped on the first day of the week. This was reinforced when we read the next passage.

I Corinthians 16:2

²Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.

We can infer from these verses that we are to worship on the first day of the week and that we are to lay by in store so that if there is a need there will be money available.

How One Gives

Some may ask the best way to give to the church. The most common practice is that a collection basket is passed around. Just when this occurs during worship service is determined by the Elders or the men of the church. It generally takes place around the same time the Lord's Supper is observed as a matter of expediency, but it really does not matter.

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Those that wish to support a church when they are not present can mail their contributions or support checks to the church.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you believe that giving is a part of worship? _____
2. Are we commanded to give? _____
3. Why did Simon the Sorcerer want to buy the gift of being able to heal people? _____
4. Are there any examples of non-Christians contributing money in the New Testament church? _____
5. Are there examples of Christians making monetary gifts to the church? _____
6. Are we told what day of the week to give? _____
7. If so, what day of the week? _____
8. Each one is to give as he _____ in his heart.
9. We are to lay by in store as God as _____
10. How does one rob God? _____

Additional Notes:

How the Church Spends / Distributes Its Money

For Needy Saints

When it comes to spending the church's funds, we must look to the Bible for an example of how the Apostles and Elders of the early church used the Lord's money.

This is where we get into the heart of the issue. Emotion often gets in the way of making sound decisions. We have previously explored how we have a lot more freedom as individuals. The church does not have such freedoms. As much as we would like to help everyone that walks through the door asking for help, we have to follow the Biblical example.

Let us look at some passages that address this issue.

Acts 11:27-30

27 And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. 29 Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. 30 This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

In the above example we see that when the brethren dwelling in Antioch wanted to help the brethren in Judea they send the money to the elders of the church in Judea. The money was not sent to a member of the Judean church. It was not sent to a third party. It was sent to the Elders.

In the days of the early church men were given certain gifts to prove they were doing the will of God. One of these gifts was prophecy. Agabus was able to tell the congregation in Antioch that there was going to a great famine. Evidently Judea was going to be hit harder, or would have a greater need, so the group in Antioch wanted to take care of the needy in that land.

Romans 15:25-26

25 But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. 26 For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.

This is an example of different churches wanting to help out needy Christians in other places. Now there was a famine in the land so everyone living in

Jerusalem, whether they were Christians or not, was going to be needy. Yet, the churches were only sending support to the “needy” Christians.

1 Corinthians 16:1-2

1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: 2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.

Look carefully at the first part of verse 1. It reads, “Now concerning the collection “for” the saints”. This verse says the collection is “for” the saints. It does not say “of the saints” or “given by the saints”, which is sometimes how this passage is interpreted. Money taken out of the church treasury for benevolence is “always” for the saints.

The fact that Paul said so there would be no collections when he came to the church indicates that he would be a recipient of some of these funds.

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2 Corinthians 8:21

20 avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us— 21 providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.

This same scripture is talking about the gift that the church in Antioch sent to the elders at the church in Judea. The elders were being told to be honorable with the distribution of the gift.

Paul is commending the Corinthians for the numerous acts of charity in the relief they sent to the churches in Jerusalem and Judea. The Christians in Jerusalem had been through wars, famine, and persecution. They were in a very severe state of need. This is a great example of Christians helping other Christians. We do not see where the support was sent to anyone in Jerusalem and Judea that were not Christians.

Galatians 2:10

10 They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.

This is where you have to do some study so as not to take things out of context. Some think this is meant in a spiritual sense. This is not the case. The poor here were the Jewish Christians in Judea that are mentioned in Acts 11:23-30. James,

Cephas, and John had sent Barnabas and Saul to these Christians with the support raised. That is why Paul said that “they desired that we should remember the poor”. It is kind of like when your mother sends you off somewhere and says something like “don’t forget to brush your teeth”.

For the Spreading of the Gospel

There are multiple examples in the scriptures that show where local churches used money from their treasury to support the preaching of the gospel.

A great example of churches supporting a preacher was the churches of Macedonia. The churches of Macedonia included cities such as Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Macedonia was a beautiful area centered on the plains of the gulf of Thessalonica. It was famous for its timber and precious metals. Paul gives the Macedonians credit in several of his letters, such as **2 Corinthians 8:1-4**.

¹Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: ²that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. ³For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, ⁴imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

Paul is commending the Macedonians to the Corinthians. He tells them that the Macedonians were in deep poverty and still insisted on sending money time and time again to the apostles for the spreading of the gospel.

Secular history confirms this and tells us that when the Romans conquered this area they took almost all of the money with them back to Rome and left the citizens there destitute.

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2 Corinthians 8:6-7

In this example, Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to give their donation to Titus so that he could bring it to Paul and he (Paul) would take the money to Jerusalem.

⁶So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. ⁷But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also.

In these two examples Paul is seeking to show the Corinthians the value in giving by recounting the example of the Macedonians. The Corinthians probably knew that Rome had ruined the economy of the Macedonians.

Paul credits the Macedonians for giving so much of themselves when they were barely getting by themselves. Rome had drained them dry. This is truly an example of what Christian giving is about. Paul stated that even in their delicate financial condition, the grace of God was still with the Macedonians.

Often people look at helping the poor or those in need as a burden. Or they look down on the downtrodden. We should look at the opportunity to help someone as a blessing, not a burden. When someone one is at rock bottom and a helping hand is extended it shows the value of being a part of the Christian family. I know I have had people help me when things seemed hopeless at the time. I really appreciated it and have never forgotten it. That is why I try to help people when I can.

Paul is showing the Corinthians that even though you may not have a lot yourself, there is no excuse for not helping others.

This lesson is intended for us as well. Even when we are going through tough economic times ourselves, the grace of God is still with us. We must remember that we are only caretakers of our possessions. Everything belongs to God. We are just the stewards. That is why we give on the first day of every week; So that we will be able to continue the work of our church as well as helping others.

Philippians 4:15-17

Paul is thanking the Philippians, who are part of the Macedonian empire, for their generosity even though they were going through tough economic circumstances themselves.

¹⁵Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. ¹⁶For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. ¹⁷Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.

Paul is talking about the beginning of the gospel. The church had just been established. It was necessary for preaching to occur. Paul departed imprisonment in Philippi and went to Thessalonica. He stayed there until a riot broke out and he had to go to Berea. He was run out of Berea as well and escaped to Athens. From Athens he went to Corinth. Sometimes we think we

have it bad. Paul was trying to spread the gospel and was being pursued by troublemakers all of the time. He was a man on the run.

Think where the church would be today if people had not supported the apostles during the early days of the church. It is a good thing to help a preacher that is laboring in the service of Christ, and often in difficult situations.

Paul said that no one other than the Philippians offered him any support. But even when he was moving around they still kept up with him and sent him financial support.

Verse 16 says that the Philippians sent once and again for his necessities. This may mean that they sent him money on one occasion and then sent him money again, for a total of two times. Or, to say "once and again" might mean that they helped him multiple times.

Paul goes on to say that he is not seeking a gift from them, meaning that he does not want to enrich himself off of their money, but he was incredibly appreciative of what they had done for him. He also told them that he hoped that the good things they had done would add to their account when it came to be judgement day. Bearing fruit is akin to receiving a reward or benefit. He hoped they were laying up treasure in heaven.

2 Corinthians 11:8

⁸I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you.

When Paul said he robbed other churches he was talking about the churches in Macedonia and Philippi. He did not mean rob in a criminal sense. I think Paul was speaking of feeling badly for taking money for services not rendered. He wasn't preaching for them at the time yet was taking their money. For some reason he did not want to take money from the Corinthians at that time. Maybe he did not want them to be able to falsely accuse him of being in it for the money. Or, maybe the church at Corinth had refused to help because they were so poor. In chapter 8 he was telling them that the Macedonian church was very poor yet they found a way to supply his needs. At any rate, he told them that he took money from others to preach to them was wasn't entirely fair to the other churches.

Hebrews 10:34

³⁴for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.

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Paul is thanking the believing Jews in Judea for supporting him. He said that they were plundering their own goods, meaning that they were giving up their own riches, and giving it to him knowing they were laying up treasure in heaven.

The commentaries state that the words “in heaven” are not in the original text but are added for explanatory content. The phrase plundering of your goods is taken from the root words as “robbed” was used in 2 Corinthians 11:8.

Should the Church Have a Large Bank Account?

How much money should the church have in its banking accounts? I have heard this subject debated more than once. If a church is blessed to have their building paid off, low operating expenses, and members that are generous givers, their bank accounts can add up to a pretty substantial sum. But, should the church be “sitting” on large amounts of cash?

We have looked at examples of churches that were generous givers when they themselves were going through difficult financial times.

2 Corinthians 8:13-15

¹³For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; ¹⁴but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality. ¹⁵As it is written, “He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack.”

Paul was telling the Corinthians that the church in Jerusalem was in trouble and needed financial help. Paul was saying that they did not have to give everything they had to help and put themselves in hardship, but that they should share in their abundance. The same goes for churches today. We should not sit on large accounts when there are places where we can put the money to good use.

One of the primary works of the church is to spread the gospel. There are people dying all over the world without the gospel. If the church is able to send laborers into the field to proclaim the gospel, that is what they should do.

A church that takes in a lot of money should have nothing left over and help those who have gathered little.

Luke 10:2

²And He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest."

There is certainly nothing wrong with having a reserve of cash in the bank for emergencies, but cash should not just be piling up. In the parable of the talents, the wicked servant was chastised for not using the money he was given charge over. We do not want to be accused of that in the day of judgement. If we have faith the size of a mustard seed we will part with our money without fear of running out. The souls that we save by sending workers into His harvest will bear fruit for us in the next life.

Churches should desire to be able to support the spreading of the gospel. Each year when the church is putting their budget together, supporting a preacher in the field should be looked at.

Churches should not sit on large amounts of cash. With the exception of an emergency cash reserve, all of the funds contributed to God should go for spreading the gospel. A church sitting on a large surplus cash that is not helping to support evangelism elsewhere is not doing its duty toward spreading the gospel to the lost world.

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For Worship and Edification

Let us take some time to discuss how the church spends its money for worship and edification

There are many examples in the Bible that establish authority for the church to edify and teach each other. We are to preach the gospel to every creature.

It takes money to operate the church. We have reviewed where the money comes from, meaning how the church raises its money, now we will look at how the church is to spend the money that is entrusted to it.

It is important to remember that the money put into the collection plate belongs to God. The church is merely the steward of the money. The church will be held accountable for how God's funds are used. This point cannot be overstated or over emphasized. Ananias and Sapphira were held accountable for keeping a portion of money they received for a parcel of land they sold, but told everyone that they were donating all of the proceeds to the church.

Almost everyone agrees that it is okay for the church to pay the preacher. However, there are people that think the preacher should work during the week, like Paul and other apostles did, and not be paid for preaching.

It is pretty clear from the passages we have reviewed already that there is sufficient Biblical authority to pay the preacher. Even Paul, who worked at his trade while establishing the church, also accepted support from other churches.

Except for paying the preacher, most spending falls under the heading of expediencies.

The subject of expediencies can be confusing to some people. Let us start by looking at the definition of what an expediency is.

What is an Expedient or Expediency?

We cannot talk about how the church spends its funds without addressing the subject of expediencies. Let us start by first defining what an expediency is.

EXPEDIENT

eks-pe'-di-ent (sumphero):

The Greek word translated "expedient" (sumphero) means literally, "to bear or bring together"; with a personal reference, "to be well or profitable." In the New Testament it never means "profitable" or "convenient" as opposed to what is strictly right. It is translated "expedient" (John 11:50, "it is expedient for us," the Revised Version (British and American) "for you"; John 16:7, "It is expedient for you that I go away," i.e. "profitable," "for your good," 18:14; 1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23;

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2 Corinthians 8:10; 12:1). In Matthew 19:10, instead of "not good to marry," the Revised Version (British and American) has "not expedient." The modern sense of "expediency" as "hastening" or "acceleration," is not found in the New Testament, any more than its bad sense of "mere convenience." "Nothing but the right can ever be expedient" (Whately). Encyclopedias - International Standard Bible Encyclopedia - Expedient

Expediencies are essential to ensure that the worship services flow in an orderly manner. I like the word essential here. We think of song books and bibles as essential. It would be more difficult to worship without them. If it is not essential, we probably should stay away from it. It is essential that we sing. It is not essential that we have a musical instrument to accompany us.

I Corinthians 14:40

40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

When it comes to our worship service, we are commanded to do all things decently and in order. This requires us to have certain things in place to ensure that this happens.

People have used the term “expediency” very loosely to justify all types of activities. Things like instrumental music and fellowship halls have been introduced as expediencies. But are they really? Let's look at what an expediency really is, or is not, as the case may be.

I have looked at a lot of reference materials on this subject and will try to give credit where those sources were used. The following four bullet titles were taken from: http://www.knollwoodchurch.org/yr2001/b03_expediency.html. Only the titles were taken. The discussion is mine.

1. For a thing to be a scriptural expedient, it must first be lawful.

In order for something to be a scriptural expedient it must be lawful as determined by our three methods of establishing Biblical authority. Those are direct command, approved example, or necessary inference. There is not a list of everything you can and cannot do in the Bible. It would not be possible to write such a book as people are always coming up with new ideas. We cannot go beyond that which is written. We have to carefully examine our practices to see if they are in fact scriptural. If not, we cannot and must not get ourselves involved in them. That which is not authorized by one of these three methods is not lawful.

We talked about the restoration movement where their slogan was to speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent. This is extremely important when it comes to expediencies.

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2. For a thing to be an expedient, it cannot be specified.

If something is specified it must be done; we have no latitude when it comes to these matters. When God told Noah to use Gopher wood, Noah could not use any other wood, even if he thought a different wood would be better. By the same token, when God told Noah to build the ark of Gopher wood, He did not tell Noah what tools to use to cut and shape the wood. Those tools would have

been classified as expedients. When God told Moses to speak to the rock, and he struck the rock instead, he was punished for it. He did not do as God commanded him. When we are told to sing, we must not add anything to it such as instrumental music. When we are told to be baptized, and the very word baptism means buried, we are not free to change it to sprinkling or dipping. We must be buried in water. The church is free to purchase things like a baptistery tank and even baptismal clothing for this purpose. Those are expediencies.

We read the story of Uzza in 1 Chronicles 13: 7-10. The Israelites were told to carry the ark using the carrying rods. David decided it would be more expedient to bring the ark back on a cart. It probably was easier, or more expedient, to them to use a cart. The problem was that God had specified the way the ark was to be moved and it did not involve a cart. As a result, when the ark started to fall and Uzza put forth his hand and touched the ark, and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzza, and He smote him.

You notice here that the scriptures say the “anger” of the Lord was kindled against Uzza. The Lord was so angry that He smote Uzzah and he died before the Lord. David meant well. He certainly did not think that he was doing anything to anger the Lord. But he did. Just because we mean well will not help us if we deviate from the written word.

When the examples of financial benevolence in the scriptures show only Christians receiving benevolence, we must follow that example and assume that we should only show financial benevolence to our fellow Christians.

3. For a thing to be an expedient, it must edify.

This is where things can get complicated if the church is not careful. For something to be an expedient, it must edify. If the church purchases song books the singing is more harmonious and the group is edified. If the church purchases study materials for class, the group is edified by studying together.

It is easy to see where people might think that building a gymnasium and a fellowship hall might be a form of edification; there simply are no examples in the Bible of the Lord’s money ever being used on recreation. As such, the Bible is silent on that subject and we must be too. It is simply not worth the risk. These activities should be performed as an aside from worship service.

4. For a thing to be an expedient, it must not offend my brother's conscience.

When it comes to our worship service we must be careful not to offend anyone over trivial matters. This does not mean that we do not preach the whole gospel of Christ, or do away with any parts of the worship service that might be commanded. Paul faced this problem with the early church.

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1 Corinthians 6:12

12 All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

In 1 Corinthians 6:12 Paul said “all things are lawful to me, but all things are not expedient”. Did this mean that Paul could do anything he wanted to? Could he go out and get drunk, commit fornication, or steal? No! Paul was talking about eating meat. It was okay for him to eat certain meats, but since it offended others, it was not expedient for him to eat these meats and cause disruption in the church.

A good example in today's world might be drinking wine or other social drinking. While most Christians do not agree with drinking alcohol, there are Christians that think it is okay to have a glass of wine with dinner. If you think it is okay to drink wine, and you know that I do not, you should not serve wine if you invite me to dinner at your home. If a Christian feels that the church should not have a kitchen and eat in the church, the church should not keep asking that person to stay and eat if they have stated that this violates their conscience.

The following table lists some of the common acts of worship, where authority is found in the scriptures, what is required to perform the act, what expediencies are required, and what we do not have authority for.

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Requirements and Expediencies				
The Act	Authority	Requirement	Expediency	No Authority
Baptism	Mark 16:16 Matt. 28:18 Rom. 6:4-6 Acts 2:38	Belief, Repentance, Burial in water for remission of sins	Baptistery, Water temperature, Running water, Statement made at time of baptism	Infants, Sprinkling, Pouring, Omitting baptism
Assemble	Hebrews 10:25	First day of the week	Length of service Time to assemble Place to assemble Order of worship	Fellowship halls Soup kitchens
Teaching	Matt. 28:18,19; 2 Tim. 2:2; Rom. 10:17; Eph. 4:15; 2 John 9-11	Apostles doctrine, The Bible, Teach the truth in love	Teaching aids, Paid preachers/teachers, Classes	Creeds of men, Less than and/ or more than the Bible
Singing	Ephesians 5:19 Colossians 3:16	Each one sings, Is a specific act, Teaching, Kinds of songs, to God, to the Lord	Training class, Song leader, Song books	Mechanical Instruments, Choir, Solo, Quartets
The Lord's Supper	1 Cor. 4:17; 11:23ff. Matt. 26:26ff. Acts 20:7	Manner, Elements, Day, In memory of the Lord, Proclamation, Communion	Containers, Place, Time, Serving the congregation	Substituting for the elements, Changing day, Private observance
Giving	1 Corinthians 16:1-2	Each one gives as he purposed in his heart First day of the week.	Collection basket Time Checks/cash	Tithes Pledge Cards
Benevolent Works	2 Cor 8:9; Matt. 5:43-48; 23:31ff., Gal. 6:10; 1 Tim. 5:16 Jas. 1 :27	Do good to all Specific: Widows, Orphans, Elderly, Our own, Neighbors	Specific need, Individual, Congregation, Homes	Benevolent societies, Raising funds through sales and concerts

Sources for table:

http://www.knollwoodchurch.org/yr2001/b03_expediency.html

<http://www.church-of-christ.co.za/articles-2/Articles/Expediency.pdf>

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We must be very careful about the use of expediencies. We are commanded to assemble ourselves together. Hebrews 10:25. If we are to assemble ourselves together, we need to have a place to meet. This causes the obtaining of a building to be an expedient.

We are commanded to be baptized. Acts 2:38. Often the desire to be baptized is unplanned, or time is of the essence. Purchasing a baptistery and installing it in the building is an expedient.

We are commanded to sing. Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16. Have you ever been in services where the song leader sang a new song that no one knew? I am sure that you have. It doesn't go very well when the song leader chooses an unknown song and we all have a song book in our hand. Imagine how bad the singing would be if we did not at least have a song book?

Bibles, song books, and other teaching materials should be provided by the church under the heading of expediencies. How would it look if we ask non-Christians for money or ask them to pay for their study materials, such as Bibles? We would look like the televangelists and cause our visitors to be skeptical of our true purpose. We cannot charge people for the cost of materials used in Bible study or children's classes. We never want a visitor to think that we are trying to separate them from their money. For that reason we also have to be careful during our collection service on the first day of the week. It is good to point out that this is a time that has been set aside for the "members" to fulfill their obligation to give. It is not a request for money from our visitors. We also do not "tell" people how much to give. People are to give as they have purposed in their hearts.

Things like fellowship halls, kitchens, and gymnasiums are not needed in order for the worship service to be conducted decently and in order. Therefore, it would be difficult to say that church funds can be used to build those facilities.

It is nice to have a place that Christians can go and enjoy each other's fellowship for recreational purposes, but those must be separate and apart from our worship service.

Anytime that the church is considering spending its funds, the question should be asked as to whether or not the expenditure is going to be used for spreading the gospel or causing the worship service to be conducted decently and in order. If not, it is best to not engage in that expenditure.

I have worshipped with brothers that feel the church should not purchase song books with church money. For that reason, they would sing with the group but they would not open the song book even though it was in the back of the pew in front of them. That is their right, and if it violates their conscience, they were right not to open the song book.

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How the Church Violates the Biblical Pattern

Some denominational churches seem to be overly focused on their collection efforts. This can cause members to look at loving act as a duty. As such, they are no longer cheerful givers.

Some denominations will have their members fill out “pledge cards” at the beginning of the year. They may track your contributions and speak to you if you are not living up to your commitment.

Most pledge cards will have a place on the outside of the envelope for your name and the amount enclosed. It is as if they are using peer pressure to get you to give more.

Contributions are private. I read an article from Houston, Texas dated November 26, 2014 where a 93 year old woman passed away. She had been a member of that church for 50 years. When she passed away the woman's daughter was told she would not be allowed to bury her mother in the church cemetery because she had not paid her tithes for the last 10 years. The lady was very sick for the last 10 years and was in a coma the last two years of her life. The preacher said she was no longer a member since she had not supported the church financially for the last ten years. The daughter offered to pay for the service, but the preacher said no, claiming that “membership had its privileges”. That can't be good edification.

Matthew 6:3-4:

³But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

What you give is between you and the Lord. A lot of members choose to write a check instead of giving cash. The men counting the money should be very careful to guard this information and be respectful of the giver's privacy.

Often people will ask why the Church of Christ does not have yard sales, bake sales, car washes, or other types of fund raisers. The reason is simple; there is no

Biblical authorization for it to do so. We have learned in the earlier portions of this study not to add to or make assumptions regarding our worship.

I Corinthians 4:6 tells us not to think of men above that which is written.

We have no examples of the church building recreational facilities in the scriptures. In fact, **1 Timothy 4:8** seems to almost forbid using the church treasury to build recreational facilities.

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1 Timothy 4:8

⁸For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

Based on what we have read, I believe that it would be a misappropriation of the Lord's money to provide social and recreational facilities.

When it comes to evangelism we cannot send the money to another church or organization to do the work of preaching. The money should be sent directly to the individuals receiving the support.

A lot of denominational churches get way too caught up in the money aspect of worship. They want to make sure that they collect every cent that they can and are very reluctant to spend the money. They are laying up treasure on earth. This is a violation of the Biblical example.

Discussion Questions

1. List the ways the church is supposed to spend their money.

2. Should the church have a large bank account? _____

3. What is the definition of an expedient? _____

4. Define the four conditions for something to be an expedient.

5. Can we use treasury money to pay a preacher? _____

6. Can we use treasury money to pay for a gospel meeting? _____

7. Can we use treasury money to pay for more than one preacher? _____

8. Can we use treasury money to send preachers out to preach either in this country or abroad? _____
9. Can we use treasury money to buy or rent a building? _____
10. Can we use treasury money to purchase cleaning supplies for the building?

11. Can we use treasury money to pay for water and electricity? _____
12. Can we use treasury money for a phone? Does the church need a telephone in the building? _____
13. Can we use treasury money to pay for a radio or television program? _____
14. Can we use treasury money to buy Bibles for the church building? _____
15. Can we use treasury money to buy Bibles and hand them out? _____
16. Can we use treasury money to buy songbooks for the church building? _____

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17. Can we use treasury money to produce or buy study materials and hand them out (e.g. tracts)? _____
18. Can we use treasury money to pay for a website? _____
19. Can we use treasury money to buy a lawnmower for the grounds? _____
20. Can we use treasury money to provide a home for the preacher? _____
21. Can we use treasury money to provide a car for the preacher? _____
22. Can we use treasury money to pay health and life insurance for the preacher? _____
23. Can we use treasury money to rent a hall for pot luck? _____
24. Can we use treasury money to buy supplies for pot luck? _____
25. Can we use treasury money to build a recreation facility? _____
26. Can we use treasury money to give out to non-Christians? _____
27. Can we use treasury money to give out gift cards to non-Christians? _____
28. Can we use treasury money to buy ice-cream, cookies, and other snacks for an ice-cream social? _____
29. Can we use treasury money to send our kids to the bowling alley or the movies for the day to build "fellowship"? _____
30. Can we use treasury money to send our kids to summer camp? _____

Additional Notes:

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What Are Our Individual Responsibilities Regarding Benevolence

James 2:15-17

15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

A lot of people are good about giving lip service to an issue but not actually doing anything. Here we are told not to do that. If someone needs something, give it to them.

What If One Is Not Benevolent

1 Timothy 5: 8

8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

The world really needs to hear this verse. There are so many broken homes with absentee fathers and mothers. People have children they don't want and dump them on the grandparents to raise. You see children fail to take care of their parents as they get old and have medical and financial problems. Even in the early church, the Jews were not taking care of their parents. This passage clearly shows that anyone that does not provide for their immediate family has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel.

Calling someone an infidel, or unbeliever, was one of the strongest insults that you could give someone. It is basically putting them on notice that they are in a lost condition and will not go to heaven. That is as serious as it gets in Christianity. That makes it clear that God expects you to provide for your family.

Is this verse speaking of a Christian or a non-Christian not providing for his own household? _____

Is God pleased with anyone that does not provide for his household? _____

What is said of this person? _____

Is this person's soul in danger? _____

I John 3:17

17But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

This statement is made to emphasize the point that if we are blessed to have this world's goods, whether it is money, food, clothing, or other necessities, and are unwilling to share with our fellow brothers in need, how can we say that God is pleased with us? The point here is that He is not.

Is this verse speaking of not helping a Christian or a non-Christian _____

What is said of this person? _____

Is this person's soul in danger? _____

Proverbs 21:13

13 Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor Will also cry himself and not be heard.

If we do not help others, we should not expect anyone to help us when we are in need. It is a terrible thought to be in a destitute situation and no one will hear our cries. Therefore, we should help our fellow man when we hear his cries.

Is this verse speaking of not helping a Christian or a non-Christian _____

What is said of this person? _____

Is this person's soul in danger? _____

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Proverbs 28:27 – How to treat the poor

27 He who gives to the poor will not lack, But he who hides his eyes will have many curses.

In opposition to the verse we just read, if we give to the poor and help others, we will not lack. But if we do not, we will have many curses pronounced on us.

Is this verse speaking of not helping a Christian or a non-Christian _____

What is said of this person? _____

Is this person's soul in danger? _____

23 Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children

and all that he had, and that payment be made. 26 The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' 27 Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

Matthew 18:18-34

28 "But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' 29 So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' 30 And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. 31 So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. 32 Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' 34 And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.

This is a great parable that really sums up how the Lord feels about those who do not have mercy on the poor and those who cannot pay their debts; especially when they have been extended a great gift. Those who do not show mercy are not worthy of mercy.

What Is the Churches' Responsibilities Regarding Benevolence?

Now that we have reviewed the differences between individual and group responsibilities, let us take a look at when the church as a group has sent mutual aid, support, relief, or whatever term you prefer, to others, and to whom the support was sent.

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Some will argue that it does not matter who the church helps because we are only doing God's will and that He is getting the glory. This is much ado about nothing. But is it?

The Necessity of Strict Adherence to the Scriptures

We in the church of Christ use three different methods to determine what God would have us do:

- Direct command;
- Apostolic example; and/or
- Necessary inference.

We must look carefully at what we are told in the scriptures and also respect the “silence” of the scriptures. We have to be very careful not to make “assumptions” in our worship to God. The Bible has several examples of people that “thought” they could decide how to worship God and to fulfill His commands. We looked at some of these passages earlier.

Deuteronomy 4:2

Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.

Deuteronomy 12:32

See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it.

Revelation 22:18

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll.

Revelation 22:19

And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.

So we are warned in both the old and new testaments not to deviate from the written scriptures. Let us look at a couple of examples of what happens when people deviate from God’s word. Yet, people since the beginning of time have.

People really should read the Old Testament more. God takes deviations from His words very seriously. People today seem to think that the Bible is a rough outline of the way we should worship, but that most matters are open for interpretation. This simply is not true. Let us look at some examples of when man took it upon himself to change what God had directed.

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Case 1 – Cain Offers Inferior Sacrifice

Genesis 4:3-7

³And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. ⁴And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: ⁵But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was

very wrath, and his countenance fell. ⁶And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wrath? and why is thy countenance fallen? ⁷If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

Cain decided how he was going to make sacrifice unto the Lord. Whatever it was that he did, God was not pleased with it. He obviously meant well in his own mind because his feelings were hurt when God was displeased.

You notice that God did not tell Cain that everything was fine; that he meant well. Cain did not receive any credit at all for his sacrifice. God essentially told Cain that if he did not like the fact that He (God) was not pleased, then offer an acceptable sacrifice the next time. Cain's one act of improper worship caused a chain of events resulting in his brother's death and his expulsion from his people.

From the way it looks, Cain was not trying to displease God. He was a farmer. He was proud of his crop and decided to offer a grain offering instead. Even though he meant well, it was not his place to change God's command.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think Cain knew what kind of sacrifice God expected from him? ____
2. Do you think that Cain was trying to please God when he offered his sacrifice? _____
3. Do you think Cain's heart was in the right place? _____
4. Do you think Cain was mad at himself or mad at God when his sacrifice was rejected? _____
5. Should Cain have repented and offered an acceptable sacrifice? _____
6. Was God pleased with Cain's sacrifice? _____
7. Did God hold Cain accountable for making a personal decision to change the type of sacrifice that God had instructed them to perform? _____
8. Do you think that God will hold us accountable if we do not follow his directives to the letter, or we choose to deviate from them? _____

Case 2 – Nadab and Abihu Present a Strange Fire

Leviticus 10

¹And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. ²And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. ³Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace.

⁴And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said unto them, Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp. ⁵So they went near, and carried them in their coats out of the camp; as Moses had said. ⁶And Moses said unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his sons, Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes; lest ye die, and lest wrath come upon all the people: but let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the Lord hath kindled.

Nadab and Abihu offered an unacceptable sacrifice because they used a strange fire. One might say fire is fire. What is the difference? Evidently there was a difference. Once again, man decided to alter God's words. The result was that God burned them to death at the altar. Their father Aaron and their brothers were not even allowed to mourn their death.

Why was this? Nadab and Abihu violated the pattern and words of God.

In Leviticus 9, Israel sacrificed to God.

- Aaron offered the sin offering, Leviticus 9:1-21
- The Lord received it, Leviticus 9:22-24

They were punished for their violation, Leviticus 10:1-3

- Burned incense with unauthorized fire, Leviticus 10:1
- The fire was to have come from the Altar of the Lord, Leviticus 16:12
- Struck dead by God, Leviticus 10:2
- Moses exhorted the people to respect God, Leviticus 10:3

We do not know why Nadab and Abihu decided to get the fire from the wrong place. It would be interesting to know. But what we do know is that God was extremely wroth and sent fire out and consumed them both. God was very direct in his instructions. This does point out what happens when you take it upon yourself to change what God has directed you to do.

Discussion Questions

1. Were Nadab and Abihu in a position to know exactly what God expected from them when they were offering sacrifices? _____
2. Who was Nadab and Abihu's father? _____
3. Judging from the family they were from, do you think they were aware of the graveness of their duties? _____

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4. Do you think they were trying to please God when they offered the sacrifice? _____
 5. Do you think their heart was in the right place? _____
 6. Did God hold Nadab and Abihu accountable for making a personal decision to use a strange fire during the sacrifice that God had instructed them to perform? _____
 7. Do you think that God will hold us accountable if we do not follow his directives to the letter, or we choose to deviate from them? _____
 8. Why do you think God did not want Aaron and his family to grieve for them? _____
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Case 3 – Uzziah Burns Incense in the Temple

2 Chronicles 26:16-21

Uzziah was made king when he was 16. He sought the council of the Lord and prospered. However, as he got older and stronger, he thought he knew what was best.

¹⁶But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense. ¹⁷And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the Lord, that were valiant men: ¹⁸And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honor from the Lord God. ¹⁹Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord, from beside the incense altar. ²⁰And Azariah the chief

priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the Lord had smitten him. ²¹And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the Lord: and Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the land.

Uzziah's improper worship caused him to be smitten with leprosy resulting in his expulsion from his people and his eventual death.

Uzziah thought that he was the king and could do anything he wanted to. Most kings had this attitude. He thought that since he ruled the people, he could be the one to go in and burn incense to God. He was told by the Priests that he was doing wrong. But, he would not listen. As a result God struck him with leprosy and he was cast out of the city according to the law. He remained in a leper's village until the day of his death. He lost his position and his son ruled in his place. Once again, a man thought he could change God's word.

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Discussion Questions

1. Did Uzziah knowingly depart from seeking after God? _____
2. Did Uzziah know he was about to transgress the law? _____
3. Was he warned that what he was about to do was forbidden? _____
4. Did Uzziah care? _____
5. Did God punish Uzziah? _____
6. Did God hold Uzziah accountable for making a personal decision to change the type of sacrifice that God had instructed them to perform? _____
7. Do you think that God will hold us accountable if we do not follow his directives to the letter, or we choose to deviate from them? _____

Case 4 – Uzzah

2 Samuel 6:7

⁷And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God.

Here we have the story Uzzah. Most Christians know this story well. The Ark of the Covenant had been captured by the Philistines in a battle with the Israelites. The Ark had always preceded the Israelite army into battle. When it did, they never lost a battle. However, the Israelites were in a state of rebellion against God so He was not with them during the battle and the Ark was lost.

This was a terrible blow to the Israelites. The Ark of the Covenant was crucial to their worship to God. Now it was in the hands of pagans.

God wanted the Philistines to return the Ark. He sent plagues upon the Philistines to persuade them to return it. Finally, the Philistines got tired of the plagues that went with the Ark and wanted to return it to the Israelites. They took it to the house of Abinadab. It remained there until Saul died and David took over as king. He wanted to retrieve the Ark and return it to Jerusalem. He took thirty thousand men with him to get the Ark.

This is where the chain of events began that would lead to the death of Uzzah.

First of all, the descendants of Kohath should have carried the Ark. Instead, David chose two of the sons of Abinadab where the Ark had resided.

Secondly, David chose a new wagon to transport the Ark back to Jerusalem. This was not the way the Ark was to be carried. The Ark had four rings on it and was supposed to be carried with staves on the shoulders of the men. Uzzah would not have known this.

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As the wagon crossed the threshing floor, the oxen stumbled. This would have shaken the wagon violently. Uzzah did what anyone else would have done; he put forth his hand to steady the Ark and keep it from falling on the ground.

God struck Uzzah dead to show that he was angry. Failing to follow God's precise directions is a sign of irreverence and rebellion.

People can rationalize anything they want to do. Uzzah's death sent a clear message to the people that it was not their place to deviate from what they are told no matter how rational it may seem to us. Uzzah's death was not in vain. The people's respect for God and the most sacred articles of their worship was renewed. It scared David so badly that he was afraid to continue in bringing the Ark to the city of David.

2 Samuel 6:8-10

⁸ And David was displeased, because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah: and he called the name of the place Perezuzzah to this day. ⁹ And David was afraid of the Lord that day, and said, How shall the ark of the Lord come to me? ¹⁰ So David would not remove the ark of the Lord unto him into the city of David: but David carried it aside into the house of Obededom the Gittite.

David got the message. We are not to deviate from God's instructions. We can add to it, subtract from it, or change it in any way.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did Uzzah knowingly disobey God's commandment? _____
2. Did Uzzah intend to break the commandments of God? _____
3. Did God know the intent of Uzzah's heart? _____
4. Did God hold Uzzah accountable for making a personal decision to do something that God had forbidden? _____
5. Did God punish Uzzah? _____
6. Do you think that God will hold us accountable if we do not follow his directives to the letter, or we choose to deviate from them? _____

Case 5 – Moses Disobeys God

For our final Old Testament case, let us look at the story of Moses. There was never a more heroic man in the Old Testament than Moses. Moses led the people out of captivity. He often made intercession for the people to soothe the wrath of God from them. Moses was loved by God. We read in Exodus 33:11 that the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend. This is never said about another man in the Bible.

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Moses' mission was to lead the people from captivity into the Promised Land. This journey took many years. Many hardships and events transpired over this journey. In Numbers chapter 20 we read that the people had entered the wilderness of Zin. There was no water for the congregation so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron. They were crying that they should have been left to die in bondage. At least they would have water. Moses and Aaron retreated to the door of the tabernacle and God appeared to them. God told the Moses to take his rod and his brother Aaron, and call the people together. He told Moses to speak to the rock before their eyes and it would yield water.

So Moses and Aaron gathered the people together and began to chastise them. He asked them if he and Aaron were to bring forth water out of the rock. He then lifted his rod and struck the rock twice. Water came out abundantly and the congregation and their livestock drank.

Then the Lord said to Moses, *“Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.”*

In other words, Moses deviated from what God had told him to do. God was not pleased with this and punished Moses and Aaron. Aaron was to die right away and Moses later.

This was a tragic mistake made by both men.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did Moses knowingly disobey God's commandment? _____
2. Did Moses intend to break the commandments of God? _____
3. Did God hold Moses accountable for making a personal decision to do something different from what He had told Moses to do? _____
4. Did God punish Moses and Aaron? _____
5. If God punished someone that He spoke to as a friend, do you think that God will hold us accountable if we do not follow his directives to the letter, or we choose to deviate from them? _____

Case 6 – Ananias and Sapphira

Perhaps one of the most famous story of mishandling God's money is found in Acts 5. There, we have the story of Ananias and Sapphira. They were a couple that was around at the beginning of the church. People were selling land and other possessions and donating the money to the church. Ananias and Sapphira got caught up in the fever of the movement and sold a piece of land that they had. They brought the money to the apostles. Evidently word had gotten

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around that people were giving all they had or all they made off of the sales of their possessions to the apostles. These people that gave all must have been getting a lot of credit and congratulatory attention. As a result, Ananias and Sapphira let it be known when they gave the apostles the money from the sale of their land that they had given all also.

Peter knew that the couple was not being truthful.

Galatians 3:3-11

³"Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? ⁴ While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." ⁵ Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. ⁶ And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him. ⁷ Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" She said, "Yes, for so much." ⁹ Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed

together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.”¹⁰ Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband.¹¹ So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.

Discussion Questions

1. What was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira? _____
2. Did Ananias and Sapphira intend to test the spirit of God? _____
3. Could Ananias and Sapphira have kept part or all of the money? _____
4. Did God hold Ananias and Sapphira accountable for making a personal decision to do what they did? _____
5. How did God punish Ananias and Sapphira? _____

Based on what we have studied, I would say that as well intentioned as one may be, one has to be very careful not to let our emotions cause us to stray from the will of God. Christians are very compassionate and do not like to see anyone suffer. However, we cannot second guess the wisdom of God. He is able to judge the character of man. He knows that just giving out money hand over fist to anyone that asks is foolish. In the first place, it is not properly appreciated. God gets no glory from a secular person that does not really

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believe in Him but prays on the Christian's good nature. God also knows that passing out money to everyone with a hard luck story will rapidly deplete the church's resources and leave no funds for the true work of the church.

When considering benevolence, it is best to remember that if we cannot find a passage to authorize the practice, dare we institute it?

Having stated that, let us ask “when and to whom then does the church offer assistance?”

Let us look at some examples of money being distributed. We will look at when and to whom the money was given.

Benevolence Given by Individual Christians

Some people think that putting money in the church treasury fulfills their responsibility of helping those in need. This is simply not the case. The Bible speaks often about individual Christians helping those in need, both Christians and non-Christians.

Some of the passages we will review will make clear that your personal success or failure when you stand before the Lord on judgement day will depend on how benevolent you were to others. It is a personal responsibility to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give a glass of cold water, or even take a stranger into your home.

This does not mean that Christians should just give out money hand over fist to anyone that asks. We have to be wise and do some due diligence on those asking. If someone is blatantly trying to take advantage of you, or is otherwise undeserving, you must say no.

I believe we will find through the completion of this study that the church's funds are limited to a very narrow set of circumstances. Some may also think that if the church is prohibited from helping the needy in certain circumstances, then they are also restricted from rendering aid. I believe we will see that the individual has no such restrictions. Therefore, if you shirk your responsibility to help others you are no better than the Levite in our first example.

We have studied a lot of verses so far about the difference between the church and the individual. We have also looked at how we are to treat our fellow Christians and those that are not. We know that if we ignore the cries of the poor that our cries will not be heard when we need them. We are now going to look at benevolence given by Christians to non-Christians first and then to Christians.

Benevolence Given to Non-Christians by Individuals

Christians are commanded to do good to all men. Jesus first demonstrated this in the parable of the Good Samaritan. It is not ironic that Jesus used a Jew and a Samaritan in this parable. The Jews hated the Samaritans. They considered them to be lower than dogs. A Jewish person would not lift a finger to help a Samaritan. Yet, in this example, a man is in serious need. None of the men that

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should have helped him even stopped to check on him. Yet, this lowly Samaritan made the Jews look very bad by doing something for one of them that they would not have done for him.

Luke 10:30-37

³⁰Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹Now by chance a certain priest came

down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³²Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. ³³But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' ³⁶So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"³⁷And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Some argue that the parable of the Good Samaritan is an example for the church. I do not see that as everyone involved in this parable is an individual to individual exchange. The church had not yet been established when this example was given by our Lord.

As Jesus was establishing the church, it was important that all men be taught regardless of their race. The Jews had a racial prejudice against anyone that was not a Jew, but particularly the Samaritans. This example served two purposes. First of all, it showed that there were people who claimed to be good, such as the Priest and the Levite that were not doing what they should be. Secondly, it showed that no matter how you feel about other races, there are good people everywhere. The man was ignored by those that should have helped him and cared for by someone that was about as unlikely as could be.

Discussion Questions

1. Who received the benevolence? _____
2. Was the recipient a believer? _____
3. Who gave the benevolence? _____
4. Was the caregiver a believer? _____
5. Was this a group or individual effort? _____
6. Was the church involved? _____
7. Was the benevolence short term or long term? _____

Luke 3:11

¹¹And he would answer and say to them, "The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise."

This passage could be meant for fellow Christians, but it can also be used for non-Christians. It shows that greed is a bad thing. If you have been blessed with

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plenty and see someone in need, you should help them. The entire New Testament doctrine is centered around doing good and helping others.

The scriptures never tell you to give someone else everything that you have and go without, but makes it clear that if you are able to help others that you should.

Discussion Questions

1. Who received the benevolence? _____
2. Was the recipient a believer or non-believer? _____
3. Does it matter? _____
4. Who gave the benevolence? _____
5. Was this a group or individual command? _____
6. Was the church involved? _____
7. Was the benevolence short term or long term? _____
8. Have you ever been helped by a believer? _____
9. Have you ever been helped by a non-believer? _____

Gal 6:9-10

9And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. 10Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

We are to sow the seeds of good works. If we do we will eventually reap what we sow. It might not be in this life. It might be in the afterlife if we remain faithful to death.

Verse 10 demonstrates that we should help Christians and non-Christians when it states, *especially to those of the household of faith*. If we were not to help non-Christians, this statement would not be necessary.

We need to constantly sow the seeds of goodness, even if it is to our enemy. You should not expect immediate gratification for your good works. Nor should you only do good works because you want to get something out of it. True goodness is doing something good for someone that cannot do anything for you. We are to lay up treasure in heaven, not on earth.

Discussion Questions

1. We should not grow weary in doing? _____
2. Are we helping Christians or non-Christians? _____
3. Should we expect an immediate return on our goodness? _____
4. What do we ultimately hope to gain? _____

5. When should we do good to others? _____
6. Is this scripture directed at individuals or groups? _____

Hebrews 13:16

16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

It is important for us to do good and to share with others. This shows that we are living as we should. Jesus set the example for us. God takes note of our good

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works and is pleased with us. If we do not do good and share, God will not be pleased with us.

I like how the word sacrifices is used here. It shows that we are giving up something when we do good deeds and share. It indicates that you are not just giving of your abundance. Sometimes you are giving to others when you may have to do without.

Discussion Questions

1. What are we told not to forget? _____
2. What does it mean to sacrifice? _____
3. Is God pleased with us when we do good to others? _____
4. Are we to do good to only Christians? _____
5. Would God not be pleased with us if we did not do good to others? _____
6. Where are we laying up treasure? _____

Isaiah 58:10

10 And if you give yourself to the hungry, And satisfy the desire of the afflicted, Then your light will rise in darkness, And your gloom will become like midday.

If we pour out our heart and our benevolence to the afflicted, we satisfy them. They are no longer in trouble. If we do this, our light will shine. Our countenance will be bright. We will feel good about ourselves and not be sad. You feel good when you help others.

Discussion Questions

1. Who should we give ourselves to? _____
2. Who should we seek to satisfy? _____
3. Does it matter if the afflicted is not a Christian? _____
4. Where will our light rise? _____
5. What will our gloom become like? _____

Ezekiel 18:7-9

7If a man does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, does not commit robbery, but gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with clothing, ⁸if he does not lend money on interest or take increase, if he keeps his hand from iniquity and executes true justice between man and man, ⁹if he walks in My statutes and My ordinances so as to deal faithfully—he is righteous and will surely live,” declares the Lord God.

This is a great way to treat our fellow man. This is mainly under the Old Law where borrowing was only for the poor. There were laws in place to keep the poor from being taken advantage of by the rich. People were not to turn their back on the poor when they were hungry or needed clothing.

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I like this verse because it states that this is between man and man. This is truly an individual to individual act. Also, even under the Old Law, these rules were written as a “how to” for the Jews to treat their fellow Jews.

Discussion Questions

1. We are not to oppress? _____
2. We should restore the debtor his? _____
3. Who are we to give bread to? _____
4. What are we to walk in? _____
5. What happens to the righteous? _____

Benevolence Given to Christians by Other Christians

Acts 2:42-45

⁴²And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. ⁴³Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. ⁴⁴Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, ⁴⁵and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

This is where the early Christians were worshipping together. They were having fellowship, breaking bread, and praying together. They saw the power the apostles had and were afraid. When the scripture says they had all things common, this meant that they believed they were as one family. They sold their possessions and other holdings and divided the money among themselves as each one had need.

The people here are individuals helping individuals. The church is not involved in this incident. They took their possessions and sold them individually. The church did not get involved. The people divided the money among themselves individually. The church was not involved. Those receiving the benefit were Christians.

Acts 4:32-37

³² Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. ³⁴ Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, ³⁵ and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. ³⁶ And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, ³⁷ having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

This is another example of the people having all things common and dividing up their possessions with those that had needs. They were no longer concerned with this world and its possessions; they were laying up treasure in heaven. If

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they had property or valuables that could be sold, they sold the products and brought the money to the apostles' feet. The people sold their possessions themselves. They did not give their possessions to the church for the church to sell. This was individual work. The apostles distributed the money that was given to the church to the needy.

In this case, the Christians were coming together to help other Christians. We do not see any examples of non-Christians receiving any of these funds.

Acts 6:1-4

¹ Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. ² Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. ³ Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; ⁴ but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

This is an example of benevolence being given to other Christians. It appears that the widows were not being taken care of. No one was seeing that they were given food every day. The people of the church were complaining to the apostles about this. If people recognized that this was a problem, I don't know why they even brought this problem to the apostles to be solved. You would think the people would have just taken care of it themselves. But the apostles told them that they had more important work to do in spreading the gospel and put the ball back in their court by asking them to appoint local men that would oversee this work.

This is the first example we have to widows in deed being supported by the church. Even at that, individuals were tasked with the responsibility of ensuring the work was carried out. The widows receiving the support had to be faithful Christians in order to receive the benevolence.

2 Corinthians 8:1-5

¹Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: ² that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. ³ For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, ⁴ imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. ⁵ And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.

This is an example of how Christians ought to give and what their attitude toward giving should be. The Macedonians had their own problems going on but were still willing to dig deep and help Paul and other Christians in need.

The churches in Macedonia were showing that they had great faith in God. One thing that makes this so impressive is that the churches in Macedonia were primarily Gentiles and they were sending money to churches in Jerusalem that were probably all Jews. Given the tensions between the two races for so long, this is a great example of Christian love and forgiveness. Especially given that the churches in Macedonia were broke. It would be one thing if they were very rich, but they were not. They had been stripped of all their wealth by Rome. These were individuals coming together and taking up a collection for their fellow Christians. We do not see any support being sent to non-Christians.

Philippians 4:15-17

¹⁴Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress. ¹⁵Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. ¹⁶For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. ¹⁷Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.

Paul loved the Philippians. Paul is acknowledging the liberality of the Philippians. Even though he often supported himself by working, there may have been times when he was not able to support himself; especially if he was imprisoned. The Philippians continued to support him even though he was not there. This is an example of supporting preachers doing mission work. Paul lets them know that they are laying up fruit for themselves in heaven.

This is another example of individuals supporting preachers doing mission work. Paul was a Christian. As such, this was a Christian receiving support from other Christians.

1 Timothy 5:9-16

⁹Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, ¹⁰well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work. ¹¹But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, ¹²having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. ¹³And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. ¹⁴Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. ¹⁵For some have already turned aside after Satan. ¹⁶If 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.

The individual has the first responsibility to take care its family members so that the church will not be burdened. The church is to step in only when there are no family members. If the church and the individual had the same responsibility, then this verse would not be needed.

You will notice in this example that not only are non-Christians specifically excluded, but there are some cases where even Christians are excluded.

You will see that:

- Young Christian widows (under 60), even with no relatives, may not get church treasury money; and

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- Lukewarm Christian widows, or widows who are not considered exemplary, are exempt from church funds.

Using common logic, if an elderly widow who does not meet the qualifications, or if a younger widow is forbidden from church assistance, how could one even think that a non-Christian should receive church funds?

These scriptures listed above clearly teach that the local church is not to be burdened with the care of widows, the fatherless, and the poor, other than the saints and their families; And only then if there is no family member that can meet their needs.

These scriptures also teach that the local church is authorized to care for its own widows, fatherless and poor if certain criteria are met.

As Christians we tend to be compassionate toward all peoples. In this example, the people receiving the support were confirmed Christians. That is not to say that as individuals we do not have a responsibility to help even those that are not Christians, but as for the church, their funds must only be given to Christians. Again, if a widow that is a member of the church cannot receive funds without meeting certain qualifications, how then can anyone think that a non-Christian could ever be able to receive financial support from the church?

2 Corinthians 8:13-15

¹³For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; ¹⁴but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality. ¹⁵As it is written, “He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack.”

Paul told the Corinthians that they were obligated to help the needy saints in Jerusalem on the principle of equality and pointed out that there may be a time when they would need someone to help them.

There are no examples that I could find in the Bible where non-Christians were helped by the church. I am sure that in those days, as well as our time, that there were a lot of widows, orphans, and other non-Christians in need. Yet there are no examples of the church helping any non-Christians. This leads us to believe that the church is not obligated to do so. In fact, based on the example of the Christian widows not being taken into the number confirms that the church should not help non-Christians.

You are always in danger when you let emotion start to direct your thoughts. We must always return to the Bible for our pattern of how to worship and run the work of the church. Verse 14 is a tricky verse. At first read, it appears that you divide your money equally with those in need so that you have the same amount. That is not the case here. Christians should give proportional to what they have. A rich person can contribute a lot more than a poor person. It could also mean that you may only bring them some equality so that they are starving while you have plenty of food to spare. It is like having all things common.

James 2:15-16

¹⁵If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?

This is a personal admonition and is not speaking of the church. However, this verse reads "If a brother or sister..." is need. This shows that Christians should take care of their own. Although we help everyone that we can, our brothers and sisters in Christ take priority.

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1 John 3:17

¹⁶By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. ¹⁷But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

This scripture is often used by those that want to shirk their own responsibility and turn it over to the church. But we know that this is can only be a personal responsibility if you simply look at the context of the verse. James lays out two commands here. He said to practice pure and undefiled religion and to keep "oneself" unspotted from the world. The idea of "oneself" is an individual mandate. Some may say that the church can also practice pure and undefiled

religion. But, in the context of James 1:27, he is making no connection to the work of the church or its function.

Greed and covetousness have no place in our Christian lives. We cannot ignore our brothers and sisters in Christ when they are in need.

Discussion Questions

1. Acts – 2:45 “and _____ their possessions and _____, and divided them among _____, and anyone had _____.”
2. Who was relieved in this scripture? _____
3. Who supplied the relief in this scripture? _____
4. Acts 4:34-35 – “Nor was there anyone among them who _____.” The people sold their possessions and brought the money and laid it at the apostles _____; and they distributed to each as anyone had _____
5. Who was relieved? _____
6. Who supplied the relief? _____
7. Who distributed the relief? _____
8. Acts 6:1-4 – Who was being neglected? _____
9. Was the need met? _____
10. 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 – Who was rendering the aid? _____
11. Where was the aid being sent? _____
12. 1 Timothy 5:9-16 – What is the minimum age for a widow to be assisted? _____
13. How many times is she allowed to be married? _____
14. She must have relieved _____
15. She must have diligently _____
16. Does this mean the widow must have been a giver herself? _____
17. Do you think a widow that has just been a pew warmer would be able to receive benevolence from the church? _____
18. 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 – Should we give to the point of being burdened? _____

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19. Does verse 14 state that we should give to the point of being equal with those who are in need? _____
20. James 2:15-16 – Who are we told to help if they are in need? _____
21. 1 John 3:17 – If you see a brother in need and do not help him, does the love of God abide in you? _____

Additional Notes:

When And To Whom Does The Church Offer Assistance?

The Bible does not spend a lot of time discussing benevolence per se. We must study the scriptures and examine the examples left for us. The bulk of benevolence is done on an individual basis. But let us look at some examples where the church stepped in to help the needy.

Needy Saints

The best verse about to whom the church offers assistance is found in **1 Corinthians 16:1**:

¹ Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye.

This verse states the collection we do each Lord's day is for "needy saints". It does not mention money being given to non-Christians.

If a local church cannot meet the needs of their needy saints, other churches can step in to help. We saw this in Acts 11 and 2 Corinthians 8-9 where famine and other events were so severe the church could not take care of its own. Other churches decided to send aid to those brethren that were suffering.

Those That Can't Help Themselves

Acts 6:1-7

¹And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. ²Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. ³Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven

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men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. ⁴But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. ⁵And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: ⁶Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. ⁷And the word of God increased; and the number of

the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

This was during the time that people were selling their possessions and bringing the money and laying it at the feet of the apostles. A lot of money was being raised. The apostles were trying to distribute the money to each poor person as they had a need. The Grecians did not feel that their widows were getting the same amount of charity that the Hebrew widows were getting. We don't know if this was really the case or not, but that was the complaint. The apostles tried to fix the complaint. They said they could not leave the work of preaching to serve tables. So they had the people choose seven people from among them that the apostles could lay their hands on to become deacons and take over this distribution so that it would be equal and above reproach. The point here is that the widows were not able to care for themselves. They were unmarried and were too old to work. They evidently had no family to care for them. As such, the church was able to provide relief for the widows.

In this case the widows were not able to help themselves. You have to remember that at this time in history, there was no social security. Women did not work outside of the home. The man worked and earned the living for his family. Under the Old Law, the family members were to take care of their elderly. These widows evidently did not have family members to support them. The widows were wards of the community. However, we know that these widows were a part of the newly founded church. They were not non-Christians.

1 Timothy 5:16

¹⁶ If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed.

The church can help the widows in need if the family is not able or they have no family, but it is the family's responsibility first so that the church is not burdened. If the church were to try and take care of everyone, it would run out of money. Also, it would usurp a command that is given to the individual.

The church is not to help anyone that can be helped by their family. Several scriptures reference the church not being burdened. If the church tried to help everyone, it would eventually run out of money. Plus, the church would be fulfilling a command that is given to the individual.

1 Timothy 5:8

⁸ But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

If the church has a family member in need and they have family that could care for them, the church has a responsibility to approach the family and let them know that this is their responsibility. It should be made clear that their soul is in jeopardy if they are not helping a “Christian” family member in need.

I put this verse back in here to reinforce the fact that families are to take care of their own.

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Mark 7:9-13

⁹And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. ¹⁰For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: ¹¹But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. ¹²And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; ¹³Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.

Corban

A Hebrew word adopted into the Greek of the New Testament and left untranslated. It occurs only once in the New Testament in Mark 7:11. It means a gift or offering consecrated to God. Anything over which this word was once pronounced was irrevocably dedicated to the temple. Land, however, so dedicated might be redeemed before the year of jubilee as found in Leviticus 27:16-24. Our Lord condemns the Pharisees for their false doctrine, inasmuch as by their traditions they had destroyed the commandment which requires children to honour their father and mother, teaching them to find excuse from helping their parents by the device of pronouncing "Corban" over their goods, thus reserving them to their own selfish use. (Easton's Bible Dictionary) If one's earthly parents are not able to care for themselves, the family had better step up to the plate and take care of them.

It is really sad to see sons and daughters turn their back on their parents as they get older. Greed and selfishness will often cause a child to not only not provide for the needs of their parents, but also neglect to spend any time with them. They often forget how the parents used to sit up at night with them when they were sick and how much the parents went without so that their children could have the things that they needed. No child that treats their parents this way

should be able to sit in a pew on Sunday and feel like they are in good standing with God.

Those Who Are Poor or Suffering Because of Emergency Events

There are events recorded in the scriptures where an unnatural event occurred that caused the Christians to be in a dire situation.

Acts 11:27-30

27 And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. 28 And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. 29 Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: 30 Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

This is a clear example of the church in Antioch providing aid to the churches in Judea. There was more than one church in Judea (Gal. 1:22, 1 Thess. 2:14). This was a dire situation where Christians could very well perish due to lack of food. In this example, the aid was sent directly to the elders in Judea by the hands of

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Barnabas and Saul. There was no intermediary between the church at Antioch and the churches in Judea. Paul and Barnabas were simply the delivery persons. The primary work of elders is to watch over the flock (Acts 20:28-29, 1 Peter 5:1-2). The elders would know which members would need aid and how much they would need.

When Hurricane Katrina hit in Louisiana a lot of brethren send relief to the needy saints there. Christians are always ready and willing to help in times of need.

Sometimes denominational churches will donate to groups like the American Red Cross. There is no scriptural authority for the church involving itself in these types of activities.

There are times when large amounts of Christians can get into trouble. Just like when the famine hit Jerusalem. Money can be sent to the elders for proper distribution. We sent money to a church after hurricane Katrina. The church had already met its needs and returned the money to us. That is the way the Lord's people are supposed to handle the Lord's money. The church cannot send money to third party secular groups like the American Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders, UNICEF, or other groups.

Benevolence Given to Churches By Other Churches

Acts 11:27-30 – Antioch to churches of Judea

27 And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. 29 Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. 30 This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

This is a clear example of the church in Antioch providing aid to the churches in Judea. There was more than one church in Judea (Gal. 1:22, 1 Thess. 2:14). This was a dire situation where Christians could very well perish due to lack of food. In this example, the aid was sent directly to the elders in Judea by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. There was no intermediary between the church at Antioch and the churches in Judea. Paul and Barnabas were simply the delivery persons. The primary work of elders is to watch over the flock (Acts 20:28-29, 1 Peter 5:1-2). The elders would know which members would need aid and how much they would need.

Romans 15:25-28 – Macedonia and Achaia help Jerusalem

25 But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. 26 For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. 27 It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things. 28 Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain.

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This is another example of emergency relief being sent by one church to another church.

1 Corinthians 16:1-4

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: 2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. 3 And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.

The people were to build up a cash reserve in order to have the means to handle any needs that might arise. They were not to wait until someone needed help to try and raise the money.

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 – Macedonia & Achaia to Jerusalem

¹Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: ²that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. ³For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, ⁴imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. ⁵And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.

In this case, which we have previously looked at, the churches in Macedonia and Achaia gave to the churches in Jerusalem even though they were in deep poverty themselves. They gave themselves to the Lord first. Then they were able to see the big picture and what being a part of the Lord's family is all about. There was no greed or selfishness in them.

2 Corinthians 8:13-15

¹³For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; ¹⁴but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality. ¹⁵As it is written, "He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack."

This means that there should not be an inequality in the giving and receiving of benevolence. For example, it would not be appropriate to expect everyone to contribute the same amount. Someone who has been blessed with great riches should recognize that their giving should be proportional to their income. It also

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means that you are not required to give beyond your means. There is a reference here to Exodus 16 where the manna was supplied by God. The manna was gathered and put into a common pot for each family. Some gathered more than they could eat. Others were not able to collect as much. But the manna was divided among everyone and none was left until the morrow. He that gathered a lot was not able to save it. Those that did not gather so much used someone else's excess so that no one had any lack.

2 Corinthians 9:1-2

¹Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; ²for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority.

Each church made its own decision about how much to send and which messengers would carry the funds. In all of the examples of a church sending support to another church, there was never an intermediary organization like a "sponsoring church" or "missionary society" used.

The Need Must Be a Legitimate Need

With every example of money being sent from one church to another church there has always been a dire emergency. We never see money sent for any other reason. It would not be appropriate to send money to another church that is raising money for a new building, or running a summer camp or other special event.

Money is to be used for the spreading of the gospel and benevolence. It cannot be used for things like ice cream socials, social meals, and other such expenditures. We will discuss this more in depth later in the study.

Discussion Questions

1. Who does 1 Corinthians 16:1 say the collection is for? _____
2. Of those that receive benevolence, virtually every example is for those who cannot help _____
3. Were the Grecian widows able to help themselves? _____
4. Is it the family's responsibility to care for their own? _____
5. What is said of the man that will not provide for his own? _____

6. What was Corban? _____
7. Can the church help those suffering from disasters? _____
8. Must those recipients be Christians? _____
9. Can the church donate to organizations like the Red Cross? _____
10. Are there examples in the Bible of churches sending aid to other churches?

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- 11. In these cases, to whom was the money sent? _____
- 12. 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 What is the main purpose of laying by in store on the first day of the week? _____
- 13. 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 Do the scriptures indicate that we should help others even to the point of putting a burden on ourselves? _____
- 14. Should the church make every effort to determine that those seeking benevolence have a legitimate need? _____

Additional Notes:

Rebuttals To Benevolence To Non-Christians

2 Corinthians 9:12-13

¹⁰Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, ¹¹while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. ¹²For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, ¹³while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal contribution to them and all men, ¹⁴and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you. ¹⁵Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

A lot of people will look at verse 13 where it talks about liberal contribution to them and all men. When you look at the subdivision of this paragraph, it is titled "The Cheerful Giver". As with the parable of the Good Samaritan, we have a duty to do good to all men. When Christians do good to nonbelievers, and the nonbeliever knows that we are Christians, God is glorified through our individual actions. Verse 12 says that the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but goes on to say that the people you help will send up prayers thanking God for your liberality. As we know, non-Christians prayers are not heard indicating that the benevolence is directed at Christians.

It is also important to point out that the words "all men" was added by the translators and is not found in the American Standard Version (ASV).

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But, let us not take a passage out of context. Who is contained in the word “all”? If you look at verse 14 it says that the “all” were praying on your behalf. Who prays for Christians but other Christians?

God does not pay attention to nonbelievers. **I Peter 3:12**

¹² “For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, And His ears attend to their prayer, But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

Therefore, it is safe to assume that Paul is referring to giving to other saints.

The word “contribution” in verse 13 is “koinonia” in Greek, which is Strong's #2842. It is used about 20 times in the New Testament. In every instance where the word is used, it is a fellowship between God-Christian, Christian-Christian, but never a non-Christian.

Given these verses, the use of the word “all” does not mean non-Christians.

Are There Requirements To Be Met To Receive Benevolence?

I Timothy 5:9-11

⁹ Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, ¹⁰ well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work. ¹¹ But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, ¹² having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. ¹³ And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not.

We have looked at this verse before. There are several requirements that must be met for a widow that is a member of the church to meet before she can receive support from the church.

There are no examples in the Bible of people receiving support just because they are members of the church. There are no examples in the Bible of non-Christians receiving support from the church. In each case, the recipient was truly in need.

When is Benevolence Withheld From Saints?

When we have examples of church benevolence in the scriptures the recipient was in dire straits. They were nearly, if not completely, destitute. There is a

difference between someone asking the church for money because they have more bills than they can pay versus someone asking the church for money because they have no job and no food.

We see that there are guidelines that must be followed prior to the church stepping in to offer assistance.

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The Needy Person Must Be Trying To Help Themselves.

1 Timothy 5:8

8 But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

2 Thessalonians 3:10

10 For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.

The church does not have the responsibility to help anyone that is unwilling to work or is turning down work.

This is an important distinction for people to notice. You cannot just give out money hand over fist.

The Family Should Step in First

1 Timothy 5:4

4 But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God.

This verse as well as verse 8 further on clearly shows that the family is the first "go-to" for benevolence.

The Church Should Be The Last Resort

1 Timothy 5:16

16 If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed.

As we see in this scripture, the church should only be approached as a last resort.

John 6:26-27

26Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. 27Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.

Jesus deals with people that were hypocrites. They acted like they were interested in what He had to say. But He knew their hearts. Earlier in the chapter Jesus had fed them and performed many miracles. The people liked being fed. People will follow anyone as long as their needs are being met. They might not agree with what their leader is saying, but they like being taken care of. Jesus

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told them not to labor for food that perishes, but for food that endures unto everlasting life.

The church sees its share of people showing up at the door professing to be followers of Christ when all they really want is to be taken in and taken care of. They want money or gift cards. If they are given money they will keep coming back to the well until the money dries up and we never see them again.

Often strangers can be given money and told when services are conducted. The people never show up for worship services. You can't bribe people to come to church. When Jesus quit feeding the people they went away.

Benevolence should never be used to lure people into the church. People that are not seeking God and are not sincere will only cause disruption in the church if they are allowed in. Bringing in people just to fill the pews is not a good idea.

Even when the person desiring benevolence is a Christian, we have to look at whether or not the need is legitimate. If he or she has no job and is not actively looking for one they should not be entitled to financial support.

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

11 And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; 12 That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.

2 Thessalonians 3:10

10 For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.

Is the member doing what they can to help themselves? For example, a member approached the church stating they have no money for food yet they drive an almost new vehicle. Or they have a nice boat that could be sold.

The member should be able to demonstrate that they are doing all that they can to help themselves before being assisted by the church.

These are things that should be considered when someone asks for support.

We saw in **1 Timothy 5:16** that the individual has the first responsibility to take care its family members. The church is to step in only when there are no family members. If the church and the individual had the same responsibility, then this verse would not be needed. This verse also demonstrates that God is worried about the church being burdened by benevolence. As such, He put limits on it. This should serve to prove that just handing out money to anyone that stops by or comes in among us is not the Biblical pattern.

2 Corinthians 8:13-15

13 For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; 14 but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality. 15 As it

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is written, "He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack." This can be used to show that we don't just hand out money.

There might be a time when there is nothing to give someone. You are not required to put yourself into debt to help someone else.

Sometimes family members will take out loans to help those that are not making an effort to help themselves. This is not something that has to be done. You are not being a bad Christian by saying no.

Is the Church Required to Verify the Legitimacy of the Request

The pattern of congregational benevolence shown in the New Testament shows the wisdom of God. By limiting benevolence to actual "members" of the church, there is less opportunity for abuse. The Elders and the members are in the best position to know the true situation their brothers and sisters are in.

However, there should be a reasonable investigation into the need to ensure that the church is exercising proper stewardship of the Lord's money.

We must ask a few questions prior to offering of benevolence. For example:

- Does this person really need help?
- Is the member trying to take advantage of us?
- Was it brought on by their own foolishness?

Unfortunately, the church is not immune to people that would take advantage of the goodness of Christians. There have been many times a person has borrowed money from several members and not payed it back. These same people seem to always have a sob story for anyone that will listen. As compassionate Christians we hate to see a brother or sister that is in a tough spot. We often learn that they are there because of their own decisions.

This is where the investigation is helpful. Sometimes we find that a member has lost their job and cannot seem to find one but has turned down work that was offered to them. If that is true, we need to know why. It may be that the member felt that they were not physically able to do the job. That needs to be examined. It may be that the member just did not want to do the job. Or, it may be that the member felt the job was demeaning for them and hurt their pride. Maybe it wasn't their "dream" job. Perhaps the job did not pay as much as they would like for it to.

Sometimes people have to be reminded that beggars can't be choosers. If your family is in need, you do what you have to do to support your family until you can do better. You cannot sit at home and wait for the perfect job to come looking for you.

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Counseling by the Elders may be needed to point that out. If after a thorough investigation it is determined that support is warranted, then it is given. Sometimes it is better to say no.

It might be that there are family members of the person in need that could take care of them. If this is the case, the Elders should reach out to the family member and let them know of their family member's condition and find out if the family intends to take care of their own family.

The Elders may find that the needy member is being given money by their family and is squandering the money. They may be using the money for various vices

they have such as alcohol or tobacco products. In this case, the church would not offer assistance to the member and become an enabler of their condition.

Does the Church Have Any Responsibility As To How the Assistance is Used

Along with determining whether or not the request for help is legitimate, the church needs to know what the money is going to be used for.

This can be a very sensitive subject. Generally, Christians are proud people and are embarrassed to find themselves having to ask for money. This is where belonging to the family of God is so helpful. Some people, especially older people raised during a different time, will sometimes sit and starve before asking for help. If we know the condition of our members, we can let the Elders know that someone is suffering and have them inquire. Of course, we as individuals should be helpful to these situations when we recognize them.

Benevolence should be limited to those things that we consider the basic necessities of life. Benevolence should be denied if the Elders feel that the funds will contribute to negative or irresponsible behavior.

Benevolence would not be issued for things like:

- Cable bills
- Cell phone bills
- Telephone bills (may qualify under certain conditions)
- Credit card bills
- School expenses
- Legal fees
- Unhealthy or non-Christian habits (Smoking, alcohol, wasteful spending, etc.) The church cannot be an enabler of poor decisions or habits.
- Other non-essential items as determined by the Elders

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There are occasions where a member may have an unbelieving or irresponsible spouse. The unbelieving spouse may have drug, alcohol, or gambling issues. The unbeliever may take the funds and use them improperly if the member were given cash. In some cases it might be more expedient to have the member bring the bills to the Elders for payment. Or, food may be purchased and taken to the home of the member. A member may drive to the gas station and pay for gasoline put into an automobile so the member can get to work.

How Much Should the Church Offer As Assistance

Benevolence is synonymous with charity. However, there is a definite line between charity and what the IRS calls inurement (or private benefit).

Churches often receive requests for help. Most churches want to help their members with legitimate requests. The elders have to determine if the need is truly legitimate and how much should the church give to the member.

Most churches have a limited budget. There is a whole other discussion as to how much money the church should have in the bank. If the church has a massive amount of money in the bank it should consider ways to use those funds to promote evangelism.

The more people the church helps, or the more you pay one person, the less you will have to help others.

You also have to be careful to be consistent with your benevolence. If two or more essentially identical cases come before the church, the amount given to each of these recipients should be the same. You should not give one a large amount of money and someone else a small amount. It would not be fair in the first place and could create bad or hurt feelings between the parties and the church should the information become public.

Benevolence is always a personal and emotional issue. It is important not to throw common sense out of the window. Some people need good sound advice more than money. The key word here is "need" versus "want".

That is where the wisdom of elders really is really needed. If a brother or sister meets the requirements for assistance it should be limited to basic necessities. If the member purchased an expensive car and can't make the payments, they may have to be told to sell the car. Making a member's car payments is not benevolence, it is a private benefit and could be considered income for tax purposes.

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Avoid Repeat Offenders

The problem with helping some people is that once they realize the church will help them they keep coming back to the church for more. The church must have a plan that sets limits. This does not make the church heartless, it makes them wise. When people receive large amounts of assistance, there is a potential for the benevolence to turn into a private benefit, which could be considered income for tax purposes.

How Does the Church Handle the Distribution of the Support

This subject has been lightly touched on previously. Distribution of the support can be accomplished in several ways.

Directly to the Needy Saint or Family Member

If the needy saint is known to be responsible and the money will actually be used for its intended purpose, the Elders can direct the Treasurer to give a check directly to the member. The problem arises when there might be the possibility of a misuse of the funds in a non-scriptural way. In such cases, the Elders should take steps to make sure the benevolence is used correctly.

Bills Can Brought to the Elders for Payment

Giving cash to a needy member when they are in a bad financial spot can sometimes be unwise. Perhaps they owe people money and are being pressured to repay it. Or, perhaps they get money for one purpose but spend it, or too much of it, on something else.

It might be that if the needy member is about to get their utilities shut off, and the Elders are afraid that if the needy member is given cash that it might not be applied to the utility bill. In this case, the Elders might ask the member to bring the utility bill in and the Treasurer will pay it. This keeps the needy member from using the assistance for an unintended purpose.

The unintentional spending of the money is not always nefarious. Sometimes the needy member might get money for a power bill and food. The family is out of food, so the member goes to the grocery store and spends too much money and now cannot pay the power bill with what is left.

The Church Can Arrange Delivery of Products

There are times when a family that is faithful is out of money and needs help. Maybe the family is out of heating oil in the winter. The Elders may call the oil

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company and arrange for a delivery of heating oil to the member. This ensures the need is met and there is no chance of misuse.

A Member Can Accompany the Needy Saint to the Store

If the Elders question the responsibility of the member to handle the distribution properly, it might be necessary to assist them. If a member needs gas to be

able to get to work and the Elders would rather not give the member cash, they might follow the member to the gas station and put gasoline in the car.

Provisions Can Be Taken Directly to the Home

Christians can show benevolence simply by taking needy items to their fellow brothers and sisters. Christians can pick up a couple of extra things when they go to the grocery store and drop them off to a family in need. This is a great way to make sure a family has enough to feed their family. This is especially true if the family is reluctant to ask or there might be a chance that any money given might not be used to buy the basic necessities.

Discussion Questions

1. 2 Corinthians 9:13 – Does the word “all” include non-Christians? _____
2. 1 Peter 3:13 – Is the face of God turned from evil doers? _____
3. Do you believe there are requirements to be met before one can receive benevolence from the church? _____
4. Are there times when benevolence is withheld from Saints? _____
5. Is the church required to verify the legitimacy of any request for benevolence? _____
6. Do you believe that people try to take advantage of the church? _____
7. Does the church have any responsibility as to how the aid is used? _____
8. Would it be appropriate for the church to pay a member's credit card bill if they were behind on the payment? _____
9. Is there a limit on how much assistance should be offered? _____
10. Should the church be aware of repeat requesters? _____
11. Name three ways the church can handle the distribution of support
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
12. Do you believe that when the church gives money to a non-Christian that God gets the credit? _____
13. Do you know of any example in the Bible where a non-Christian received money or support from the church? _____

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14. Do you believe that you can individually give money to a non-Christian? ____
15. Do you believe that you can really know how the person really lives and spends their money that is not a Christian? _____

16. Do you believe that helping non-Christians in need is the same as having fellowship with them? _____
17. Do you believe that money given to non-Christians which may be used inappropriately makes you a partaker of their evil deeds? _____
18. Have you had experiences where benevolence was given to a non-Christian and they actually came to services? _____
19. If so, how many times did they attend? _____
20. Do you believe that if a non-Christian can receive the benefits afforded to Christians that the value of being a Christian is then cheapened? _____

Additional Notes:

Do the Following Practices Violate the New Testament Pattern of Benevolence or Use of the Lord's Money?

Fellowship with Unbelievers

Some think that when the church gives money to a non-Christian that God gets the glory and this will help convert the one in need. People may ask, "If the person is going to be converted, is it wrong to offer benevolence in advance?"

The answer is yes, it is wrong for several reasons. Just as the examples we looked at earlier where someone took liberties with God's instructions, we would be doing the same thing if we decided on our own to change God's plan and offer benevolence to non-Christians.

Besides this, there is no guarantee that the person is going to be converted or even has the desire to be converted. To take them in and begin fellowship with them before they are converted is the same as keeping company with nonbelievers.

Now let us look at some scriptures that deal with this issue.

2 Corinthians 6:14-15

¹⁴ Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

¹⁵ And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?

Ephesians 5:6-7

⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ Therefore do not be partakers with them.

Ephesians 5:11

¹¹ And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.

1 Timothy 5:22

²² Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure.

2 John 1:9-11

⁹ Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; ¹¹ for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

You can tell from these passages that we are not to have fellowship with unbelievers. When you support someone's bad habits you are in fact having fellowship with them.

I have been involved in many cases where we as individuals helped out someone that showed up on the church steps asking for assistance. Only once or twice did the person actually stay for that particular service, and then they were never seen again.

Some are right up front and say that they are only looking for free food or gift cards. They have no interest in studying.

This is the same problem that Jesus had in John 6 where the people were following Him because of the loaves and fishes.

When you give money to someone that going to use that money to purchase drugs or alcohol, you are not only enabling them, you are becoming a partaker of their evil deeds.

We cannot prejudge people and assume that they are going to buy bad things, but at the same time we do not know. See Ephesians 5:6-7. Some of these

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people are professional victims. They know all the right things to say to tug at your heart strings. When benevolence is limited to the members of the church, the elders know whether or not the need is legitimate.

One of the beauties of being a member of the Lord's family is that we know our family will take care of us.

If non-Christians receive the benefits reserved for Christians, the value of being a Christian is then cheapened.

Missionary Societies

We know that the primary mission of the church is evangelism. We are to spread the word and convert as many people as possible.

Matthew 28:19-20

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

We also know that the church should support the act of evangelism.

Philippians 4:15-17

15 Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. 16 For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.

However, we must not violate the New Testament pattern of the scriptures.

A lot of denominations have what is commonly called a "missionary society". This is an organization that is established to fund their "missionaries" throughout the world. Individual churches within the denomination send money to the

missionary society for distribution where it is needed. The question is whether or not this practice is Biblical.

There is no mention of any such organization in the Bible. We have already looked at examples of how preachers were supported at the beginning of the church. We saw that some preachers supported themselves by:

- Laboring with their own hands (Acts 18:3)
- With the support of their local church (2 Corinthians 11:7-10)
- Direct support from local churches (Philippians 4:15-17)

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We know that the scriptures teach that each church is an autonomous body. Each congregation has its own elders and deacons. **Acts 20:28, Titus 1:5**, and other scriptures show that each congregation is self-governed.

Each congregation is responsible for its own growth, edification, benevolence, and support of its evangelist. There is no example of a higher governing organization in the scriptures.

The missionary society arrangement presents two problems for the local church.

When the church sends their money to a third party for distribution they give up control of how the funds are spent. If the church thinks the money is being spent improperly they have no recourse. The money could be spent improperly. This would make the local church a partaker of the unscriptural distribution. Secondly, when you set up any organization, it requires funding. The funding required to support the organization siphons off money and reduces the amount that could have been sent directly from each individual church. It is not uncommon to see more money spent on running the organization than what is actually spent on the cause. One only has to do a little web searching to find missionary societies where the CEO makes 300,000.00 per year or more. This is an incredible waste of God's money.

There are times when a group of Christians will get together and pool their resources to fund things like evangelist that might work with small churches that cannot afford a full time preacher. Or, perhaps they make a contribution toward a building fund for a fledging church. As we have seen earlier in this study, the church and the individual are not bound by the same constraints. Individuals can come together and do these good works but funds from the church treasury should not be used.

When the church is sending money to another church or organization, they are having fellowship with that group. If that group is not following the Biblical pattern, then you become a partaker of their evil, or non-scriptural deeds.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you believe that the lack of evangelism is a serious issue facing the church today? _____
2. Do you believe that evangelism is a personal responsibility or a congregational responsibility? _____
3. Do you believe that church funds can be used to support organizations that send missionaries into the field? _____
4. Do you believe that church funds being sent to missionary societies meets the New Testament pattern for how the Lord's money is used? _____
5. Did the apostles receive support from organized groups? _____

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6. Do you believe that a preacher must work outside of the church to help support himself? _____
7. Do you believe that preacher can be fully supported by the church that he works for full-time without having to work outside of the church? _____
8. Do you believe that you have a personal responsibility to help spread the gospel? _____
9. Do you believe that as an individual you have a right to send your personal money to missionary societies? _____
10. Do you believe that the church loses control of their money when they send it to a missionary society? _____
11. Do you think that missionary societies require money to operate that could be used for the direct support of preachers? _____
12. Do you believe that by sending money to other organizations, that you are having fellowship with them? _____

Additional Notes:

The Sponsoring Church Arrangement

Something you see in some “Churches of Christ” is where benevolence and evangelism are funded through the sponsoring church arrangement. This is where one church supports one or more missionaries in a certain place and all other churches that want to contribute send their money to the church instead of directly to the evangelist. Or, in the case of benevolence, one church may set up a fund that will be used for benevolent works. The sponsoring church encourages other churches and other Christians to send money to the fund. The sponsoring church hears of a need and makes the decision to send aid to the needy from the fund. Sometimes the recipients of this aid may not even be members of the church.

In this case the churches that send money to this fund are not making the decision as to how the money is spent. They leave those decisions up to the

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sponsoring church. This is not following the Biblical pattern. Money sent from the treasury should have a very narrow specific use. The church sending the money should send it directly to the intended recipient for a specific purpose.

Even if you choose to send money as an individual to one of these funds, you need to make sure that the money is going to be used according to the New Testament pattern. Otherwise, you are encouraging a church that may be involved in an unscriptural act.

Example 1

I came across a group called the Churches of Christ Disaster Relief Effort. The following was taken directly from its website:

“Incorporated in 1994, Churches of Christ Disaster Relief Effort immediately responds to any major disaster in the continental United States by sending truckloads of emergency food, water, cleaning, and other supplies to disaster victims. The organization has distributed more than \$106 million in emergency food and supplies in response to 301 disasters in 42 states. Churches of Christ Disaster Relief only works through the local Church of Christ in the community or town, where the disaster has occurred. If there is no Church of Christ in the town, Disaster Relief will contact the nearest town that has a Church of Christ and ask for help. Supplies will be distributed by this congregation in the name of the Lord to anyone who has been affected by the disaster regardless of race, color, creed, or religion.”

“We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. that employs fifteen paid personnel. The success of our organization is because of the hundreds of volunteers that help us. Volunteers help us pack the majority of these supplies in our Nashville warehouse so they are ready to be distributed as soon as they're received. Members of Church of Christ congregations across the country volunteer their time to distribute these supplies to help the community that was damaged.”

Example 2

Another church in Texas has a food pantry that is totally funded by the members. No church funds are used to buy the groceries. They prepare and hand out approximately 400 bags of groceries every year to anyone that asks. Of these 400 unique requestors, approximately 4 -5 percent have attended between 2 – 4 services and were never seen again.

There is no mention of either of these “arrangements” in the scriptures.

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We an example in the scriptures where money was sent from the local church to churches in need via Paul and others. Some have argued that this is an example of the church in Jerusalem assisting other churches in evangelism. But if you look at the scriptures you will see this is not the case.

In Acts 11:27-30

27 And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. 29 Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. 30 This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

We see that the disciples (Individual), each according to his ability determined to send relief. In verse 30 we see that the money was sent to the elders of the church by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. Money was not given to Barnabas and Saul to distribute. The local church, the recipient of the money, would have known how best to use the funds.

In conclusion, there is no scriptural example of the sponsoring church arrangement and such an idea would violate the autonomy of the local church concept.

When the church is sending money to another church or organization, they are having fellowship with that group. If that group is not following the Biblical pattern, then you become a partaker of their evil, or non-scriptural deeds.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you believe that the Sponsoring Church arrangement meets the New Testament pattern? _____
2. Do you believe that church funds can be used to support Sponsoring Church organizations? _____
3. Do you believe that church funds can be used to support areas affected by natural disasters? _____
4. Do you believe that you have a personal responsibility to help areas where the gospel has not been taught? _____
5. Do you believe that as an individual you have a right or responsibility to send your personal money to organizations that are sending money to distressed areas? _____
6. Do you believe that non-Christians in areas where natural disasters have occurred have a right to receive money from the church? _____
7. Do you believe that non-Christians should be given aid by church funds under any circumstance? _____

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Additional Notes:

Orphan Homes

Nothing tears at your heart strings more than little child in need. Every once in a while you will see commercials on the television of starving children in third world countries that are living in abject poverty. They are starving to death, poorly clothed, and appear to have no hope of survival. The celebrity spokesperson will tell you that for just pennies a day you can feed several children, buy clothes for them, and send them to school.

Unfortunately, if you take a close look at these so called “charities” you will find that only a few pennies out of every dollar contributed actually go to the “starving children”. The bulk of the money stays with the organization. Those running the operation make large salaries and live lavish life styles while those in need continue to suffer.

Let us go back and look at **James 1:27**:

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

We saw earlier in our study that this requirement is an individual responsibility; not a congregational responsibility.

Do we, as individuals, have a responsibility toward orphans? Yes we do!

The word “visit” is defined as “to look upon or after, to inspect, examine with the eyes; in order to see how he is, i.e. to visit, go to see one; the poor and afflicted” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 242). Those who oppose the church supporting such institutions have often been labeled as orphan haters, etc. Such is not the case at all. If we are going to be what the Lord would have us to be, then as one sees a need, has an opportunity, then they have a responsibility.

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The problem is the control and the distribution of the Lord’s money that was given to the treasury. We studied earlier in this study that as an individual you are free to spend your money any way that you see fit. There is nothing wrong with individuals sending money to orphan homes.

If the church cannot support non-Christian widows and orphans, how can one then believe that the church could build, maintain, and oversee or support orphan homes?

Money sent to orphan homes does not meet the examples of congregational benevolence that we see in the scriptures. The New Testament pattern has

always been church to saint, or church to elders of the church in need, so that the elders could oversee the distribution to the needy members.

When is the last time you visited a widow or an orphan? I believe that some people prefer that the “church” send money to the orphan homes. I fear that they may feel that by dropping a few dollars in the collection plate they have done their part and do not need to actually visit anyone.

However, let us look at Matthew 25:43:

41 “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: 42 for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; 43 I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’ 44 “Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ 45 Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ 46 And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Some may claim that the Church of Christ does not believe in taking care of orphans. This is simply not true. It is hard for me to believe that if a child of a local church suddenly became an orphan, and had no other family, that a local member family would not take the child into their home. Furthermore, I believe that if this situation were to arise, and there were families able to take the child, that it would be sinful to allow the child to be whisked off to an impersonal institution where he or she knew no one and was put into “the system” and forgotten.

I find it rather ironic that if someone has a pet that they need to get rid of, they will go to great lengths to find a suitable home for the animal. They will even

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resort to helping pay for the upkeep of the pet if someone will take it. They find it unconscionable to even consider taking the animal to the pound. How much more precious is a child?

Discussion Questions

1. Do you believe that the care for orphans is a serious issue facing the church today? _____
2. Do you believe that the care for orphans is a personal responsibility or a congregational responsibility? _____
3. Do you believe that church funds can be used to support church based orphan homes? _____
4. Do you believe that church funds can be used to support institutional (not church based) orphan homes? _____
5. Do you believe that church funds being sent to orphan homes meets the New Testament pattern for how the Lord's money is used? _____
6. Do you believe that you have a personal responsibility to visit widows and the fatherless/orphans? _____
7. Do you believe that as an individual you have a right to send your personal money to organizations that care for orphans? _____
8. Do you believe that if a child in your church suddenly became orphaned, and had no relatives, that someone in your church would take them in?
9. Do you think it would be okay for the church to give money to a family of a church that took in an orphan to help support the orphan? _____

Additional Notes:

Nursing Homes

People today are living longer than they used to. Problems often arise as people age and are no longer able to care for themselves. Sometimes the family is not able to care for their older adult family members. Often the elderly family member has to be placed into a facility that can care for them. No one likes the thought of having to place their loved one in a nursing home. Good nursing homes are hard to find and are very expensive. The majority of these facilities are not very desirable.

We are starting to see churches of various denominations getting into the nursing home business. This is where the problem begins. While it is commendable for churches to want to ensure that their elderly members are properly taken care of, it is a violation of the New Testament pattern for church funds to be used for this purpose.

James 1:27

27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Matthew 25:35-36

35 for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

The problem I see with nursing homes is that they do not meet the pattern of New Testament benevolence. Even if they were scriptural, they have issues that are akin to the Missionary Societies. The institution itself requires a great deal of money to operate. That money could have been used for direct support of the needy.

I do not see anything wrong with privately funded "Christian" nursing homes. I do not see scriptural authority to have any church funds sent to these organizations.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you believe that the care for elderly Christians that are no longer able to live independently is a serious issue facing the church today? _____
2. Do you believe that the care for these elderly Christians is a personal responsibility or a congregational responsibility? _____
3. Do you believe that church funds can be used to support church based nursing homes? _____
4. Do you believe that church funds can be used to support institutional (not church based) nursing homes? _____
5. Do you believe that church funds being sent to nursing homes meets the New Testament pattern for how the Lord's money is used? _____
6. Do you believe that you have a personal responsibility to visit elderly Christians? _____
7. Do you believe that as an individual you have a right to send your personal money to organizations that care for the elderly? _____
8. What do you think should be done with elderly Christians that are no longer able to care for themselves? _____
9. Do you think it would be okay for the church to give money to a family of a church that took in an elderly Christian to help support them? _____

Additional Notes:

Hospitals

The establishment of church owned hospitals in the United States dates back to the late 1870s with the church of the Latter-day Saints. They felt a responsibility to care for the physical well-being of their members and their neighbors.

One driving factor was the high infant mortality rate among their members. The church urged their women to obtain medical degrees in the East and then return to their community in Utah to work in the church hospital.

Now, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Seventh Day Adventists, Presbyterians, Jewish organizations, and others have hundreds of highly respected hospitals across the United States.

When people are sick they are more receptive to being prayed over and taught. These hospitals often pass out their “religious doctrine” for patients to read while they are in the hospital.

While this may be a noble intent, does it meet the New Testament pattern of use of money from the treasury?

There is no example in the New Testament of a church owning or sponsoring a hospital.

As the primary mission of the church is evangelism, does operating a hospital put the church in a unique position to teach the gospel to unbelievers?

When people are seriously ill they tend to be more receptive to the fact that if diving intervention will help them they will take it. It is the same when non-Christians attend a funeral. Being seriously ill or attending a funeral makes people acutely aware of their own mortality. Non-Christians do not tend to think about spiritual things until they are faced with something that they cannot fix on their own. This is where some churches think that by having a hospital they would have a captive and receptive audience.

Hospitals run by religious organizations can help put money back into the treasury or take money out of it. There have been hospitals that have gone bankrupt and the church had to close them. Money that had been put into running the hospital could have been used for true evangelism. It is extremely expensive to own and operate a hospital.

As we asked earlier, does running a hospital meet the Biblical pattern?

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James 5:13-16

¹³Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. ¹⁴Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

We read in this passage that if one is sick he or she is to call for the elders to pray over them. A prayer of faith will save the sick and the Lord will raise them up. This would have been a perfect place to say if any is sick that they should go to the church hospital. It does not.

There are many examples where Jesus and the apostles walked among the people and healed them of their sicknesses. There is never a mention that these people were visited in an infirmary of any type.

We do have an example of an individual helping someone in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Luke 10:33-35

³³But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.'

Discussion Questions

1. Do you believe that the church should run hospitals? _____
2. Do you believe that it would be okay for a church to help support a hospital? _____
3. Do you believe that it would be okay for a church to have reading materials in hospital rooms for patients to read? _____
4. Do you know if any examples of church funds being used for hospitals in the New Testament? _____
5. Do you believe that it okay for you to go to a hospital that is run by a denomination since some of that money goes to the church? _____
6. Would you allow the hospital chaplain to pray for you when he visits you in the hospital? _____
7. Do you believe that individuals can donate their personal money to church run hospitals during telethons and such? _____

Additional Notes:

Charities

Christian charity and benevolence are often confused. Some people believe that showing love is a form of charity since love is one definition of charity.

In addition, there are “Christian” charities that raise money to feed the poor and spread the gospel to those that have not been exposed to it. They make claims such as “for a dollar a day you can support a child in need. You can give them an education. You can ensure that they have the proper medical care. They have an opportunity to learn a life skill so they can support themselves”.

The Salvation Army is one such group that actively solicits funds and donations that are to be used to bring salvation to the poor, destitute and hungry by meeting both their physical and spiritual needs.

Although they were started by a Methodist preacher, they have become more liberal and non-denominational.

People often become unwitting partakers of their “mission” when they make donations of furniture and clothing. The Salvation Army has many stores where they sell the donated goods to raise money to run their organization. They are most famous for their bell ringers that stand outside of malls and other retail stores during Christmas. People drop money into their red pots.

All charities that I have found provide their services to anyone whether they are Christians or not.

According to Wikipedia, in 2004 the Salvation Army had an annual operating cost of 2.6 billion dollars! The fact that the Salvation Army alone has to spend 2.6 billion dollars just to run the organization shows why this study was aimed at exposing why third party or intermediary organization is not helpful.

This is just one example of why these charitable organizations are not the most expedient way to help people. The New Testament plan is the most efficient. The money is sent directly to those Christians in need.

Churches will often pick a week in which they take up a collection of items to be donated to these charities. Members bring all of their items to the church building and someone will take the items down to the collection point of the charity. Technically, this could make you a partaker of their deeds. When you watch a television telethon or consider a donation to one of these charitable organizations, keep in mind that in addition to the practice not being scriptural, the bulk of the money you donate will go to running the organization.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you believe that the church should run charities? _____
2. Do you believe that it would be okay for a church to donate money or items to help support a charity? _____
3. Do you think that church charities should make their services available to anyone that asks whether they are Christians or not? _____
4. Do you think that an individual can donate to so-called Christian charities?

5. Do you believe that it is waste of resources when a charity gets so large that it costs billions of dollars per year to operate? _____
6. Do you believe that these charities violate the New Testament model for benevolence? _____

Additional Notes:

Non-profit Political or Social-Issue Groups

Some religious organizations get involved in political campaigns and other social issues. Candidates like to get the endorsement of religious organizations like the Southern Baptist Convention and others.

Jesus was tempted by the Pharisees in order to trap Him into saying that the people were not subject to the rulers of the land.

Matthew 22:15-22

¹⁵Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk.

¹⁶And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men. ¹⁷Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

¹⁸But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? ¹⁹Show Me the tax money."

So they brought Him a denarius.

²⁰And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?"

²¹They said to Him, "Caesar's."

And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." ²²When they had heard these words, they marveled, and left Him and went their way.

Jesus would not get involved in the politics of the earthly government.

Romans 13:1-2

¹Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

²Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

We are to be subject to the laws of the land. That does not mean that we should not be concerned about those that have the rule over us.

I Timothy 2:1-3

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, ²for kings and all who are in authority, that we

may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. ³For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,

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We are to pray for those in authority.

As individuals we are free to contribute to the campaigns of those that we feel will best represent us. We are also free to contribute to those causes that are important to us but church funds should not be used for these situations.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you believe that the church should run political action groups? _____
2. Do you believe that it would be okay for a church to donate money or items to political action groups? _____
3. Do you think that an individual can donate to political action groups?

4. Do you believe that Christians should be informed about the positions of those running for public office and vote accordingly? _____
5. Do you believe that scriptures teach that Christians need to be in submission to those that have the rule over us? _____
6. Do you believe that Christians need to pray for our leaders? _____

Additional Notes:

Colleges

One of the major issues facing the church today is the threat of institutionalism. Institutionalism causes pressure to be put on the church to support things like colleges, missionary societies, orphanages, food pantries, and other various organizations.

Bible schools and Bible colleges were the slippery slope that opened the door to institutionalism. People often think that church supported schools are necessary to protect the integrity of the education of our youth. It is sometimes felt that secular institutions, such as the public school system, are a bad environment for our youth to be exposed to. There is probably some truth to the public school system not being a good wholesome environment for our children. With things like evolution, abortion, and gay marriage being taught in our school system, it is no wonder that all parents would like to send their children to Bible based schools.

This becomes a problem when members begin to think that churches should take money from their treasury to “assist” the Bible school in its work.

As we have studied over and over in this work, individual Christians are free to contribute their personal funds to any worthwhile work, such as colleges, orphanages, and helping the needy, but no funds should be taken from the church treasury for this purpose. It violates the New Testament pattern of use of the Lord's money.

During New Testament times, the church preached the gospel and edified itself under the guidance of their own eldership. This is seen in scriptures such as: Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:2, and Ephesians 4:16. There were no outside agencies and the church did not have to account for these organizations in their budgets.

Another issue that arises with Christian schools is that the state government is starting to dictate the curriculum in order for the school to be “accredited”. In some cases, Christian teaching is being deemed as “hate speech”. This can bring unwanted attention to the local church.

Educating our youth in a Godly atmosphere and training young preachers to carry on the work of spreading the gospel is a noble and worthwhile work. However, this effort must be carried out according to the New Testament pattern.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you believe that educating our youth in a Godly environment is an important concern? _____
2. Would you like for your children to attend a Christian school? _____
3. Do you think that schools of preaching are a good work? _____
4. Do you think it is okay for a church to send contributions from their treasury to help in the support of these institutions? _____
5. Do you think that it is okay for you as an individual to help support Christian schools and schools of preaching? _____
6. Do you worry about your state starting to classify Christian doctrine as “hate” speech in your school system or local church setting? _____

Additional Notes:

Recreational Facilities

For some time “denominational” churches have been known to build recreational facilities such as ball fields and gymnasiums. Some churches advertise their facilities on their websites. We see things like basketball, gymnasium, weight room, cardio area, walking track, game room (with game tables including ping pong, billiards, air hockey, etc.), racquetball courts, and craft areas. A lot even have coffee bars.

Sadly, these amenities are finding their way into Churches of Christ facilities. This leads back to the institutional movement sweeping the church.

These facilities are very expensive to build, maintain, and staff. It also puts the church in potential jeopardy of a lawsuit should someone get hurt.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you believe that the church should be in the recreation business? _____
2. Do you think that recreational activities can generate fellowship? _____
3. Do you think that these facilities are a good use of the Lord’s money? _____

Additional Notes:

Fellowship Halls

Fellowship halls have long been a sign of other denominations but have been creeping into Churches of Christ. This is starting to create quite a stir among brethren. There are a couple of issues that merit closer examination. Fellowship Halls and eating in the building is a study in and of itself. We are going to examine it only to the point of whether or not the church is authorized to spend its money on the construction and filling of a "Fellowship Hall".

Hospitality is the function of the home, not the church. The word "fellowship" in the Bible is "koinonia". At no time that it is used in the Bible does it refer to social fellowship. When we meet at the church building to be together and study God's word, we have a "fellowship hall". This is because we are having fellowship with one another. The difference is that it is not a social event.

The Lord does not have a problem with Christians coming together and eating and enjoying each other's company.

Acts 2:46

46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

This is one passage that shows the people met in the temple, supposedly to study and worship, and then went to each other's homes to eat.

It is a dangerous practice to start mixing social and spiritual events together.

I found an article on the LaVista Church of Christ website entitled "Fellowship Halls?" by Mark Dunagan. Most of this section is written around that article. [viii]

Begin section from LaVista Church website on this topic. [viii]

Somewhere around the 1950's Churches of Christ began to take money from their treasury to build a room or building with a kitchen and a large dining room or "fellowship" hall. These structures were not built to feed needy Christians, rather they were built to feed and entertain already well-fed members.

We must remember that it is not the mission of the church to provide amusement for the world or even its own members. Innocent amusement has its place in the life of all people, including Christians, but it is not the business of the church to furnish it.

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For the church to turn aside from its divine work to furnish amusement and recreation is to pervert its mission. It is a departure from the simple gospel plan as revealed in the New Testament.

The Gospel Advocate Quarterly took on this issue in 1951. It specifically mentioned two issues regarding this subject.

1. To oppose "fellowship" halls and all things which go along with church sponsored recreation is to hold the "common" view.
2. Since congregations have actually split over this issue, who caused the division? Who took a "radical" position? Who placed a "fellowship" hall over fellowship with their brethren? Who said that having a kitchen in the building is more important than unity?

Ephesians 4:1-3

¹ I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ²with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

What are some of the Arguments that do not add up?

A. The Love Feast

The two scriptures below deal with false teachers and sin creeping into the church unnoticed and wreaking havoc on the church. These events would lead to the destruction of the church like a hidden reef will sink a ship.

2 Peter 2:13

¹³ And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you;

Jude 12

¹² These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted;

It is argued that the "feast" mentioned in these two verses were church-funded dinners or potlucks, very similar to the modern church dinners which are served in a "fellowship" hall, where members conduct birthday parties, anniversary celebrations, baby showers, etc..

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The idea that the “love feast” was a social meal connected with, following or before the Lord’s Supper is a common denominational view.

Paul took on this issue in 1 Corinthians 11:22 and 11:34.

22 What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.

34 If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you will not come together for judgment. The remaining matters I will arrange when I come.

Paul not only separates the Lord’s Supper from a social meal, but he commands all such meals to be engaged in “at home”.

Some think that Paul is simply correcting the Corinthians abuse of “fellowship dinners”, but that we are not to interpret Paul as saying that all such church sponsored dinners are wrong. Is that what he really meant? Let’s look at a couple of points:

1. Paul is correcting an abuse of the Lord’s Supper!
2. When correcting an abuse of something that was legitimate, Paul never completely outlawed the practice. Rather, he proceeded to regulate it.

I Corinthians 10:25 and 10:33

25 Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience’ sake;

33 just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved.

3. Paul never regulates “church dinners”. He places all such meals in the private sector. Notice that Paul did not say, “Let’s go ahead and eat the Lord’s Supper and then we can have a banquet dinner, or pot luck, after the dismissal prayer”.

Even many denominational commentators argue that the “love feast” wasn’t a social meal at all. Rather, it is simply another name for the Lord’s Supper. ‘When we come to Justin Martyr (ca. A.D. 150) we find that in his account of church worship he does not mention the agape (love feast) at all, but speaks of the Eucharist (Lord’s supper) as following a service which consisted of the reading of Scripture, prayers, and exhortation.’ (I.S.B.E. revised. ‘Agape’, p. 66).

Someone also pointed out that from simply reading [II Peter 2:13](#) or [Jude 12](#) (if this was a social meal) the text says absolutely nothing about where these feasts

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took place. Did such feasts take place in private homes or were they church funded?

A recognized method of interpretation is to let the Bible interpret itself. (a) The social meals of the early church in Jerusalem happened in the private homes of the members. ([Acts 2:46](#) 'and breaking bread from house to house')

Paul places all social meals outside the assembly ([I Corinthians 11:22, 34](#)).

B. The Use of the Word "Fellowship"

It is a common assumption that the word "fellowship" includes social meals. I think many members of the church picked this up from the denominational world. Unfortunately, the word "fellowship" as used in the Bible is never used or attached to social meals or a dining hall. I find the word used for sharing in spiritual things. ([Acts 2:42](#); [I Corinthians 1:9](#); [Philippians 2:1](#); [I John 1:3](#)) I also find the word used in reference to the Lord's Supper ([I Corinthians 10:16](#)).

Acts 2:42

⁴² And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

1 Corinthians 1:9

⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Philippians 2:1

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy,

1 John 1:3

³ that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 10:16-17

¹⁶ The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of

Christ? ¹⁷For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.

Note: If a social meal can be called "fellowship", then it also can be called "communion" for that is one way in which this word can be translated. I even

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find the word "fellowship" being used of sharing in physical things. But in those instances, the sharing was always to relieve a definite pressing need. ([Romans 15:26](#); [II Corinthians 9:13](#); [Philippians 1:5](#); [Hebrews 13:16](#); [I Timothy 6:18](#))

Romans 15:26

²⁶For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.

2 Corinthians 9:13

¹³while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men,

Philippians 1:5

⁵for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now,

Hebrews 13:16

¹⁶But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

1 Timothy 6:18

¹⁸Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share,

C. The Church Sponsored Meals of Acts 6

Points to Note:

Such meals were for benevolent purposes. We have clear scriptural authority for the church to use its funds to house, cloth, feed, etc., members who are in need.

1 Corinthians 16:1-2

¹ Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: ² On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.

But modern day church dinners and "fellowship halls" are not for benevolent purposes.

Such meals were only for needy Christians. Carefully note that the apostles never started the modern practice of using free food and recreation to draw non-Christians.

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D. But It Is a "Good Work"

Often you will hear the following in the attempt to justify church sponsored social meals:

'But churches that build kitchens, dining rooms, gyms, etc., GROW!' But a certain kind a growth means that you are on the wrong road.

Matthew 7:13

¹³ "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it."

In addition, churches that teach Premillennialism, Calvinism and the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, also grow. In fact, such churches grow faster and bigger than the ones who merely opt for "fellowship" halls.

The Bible defines what a "good work" is:

2 Timothy 3:16-17

¹⁶ All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Nowhere in the Bible do we find church sponsored social meals, recreation or "fellowship" halls.

And to me here is the real "rub" of the social gospel or liberalism. According to certain people church dinners and "fellowship" halls are mandatory for church growth, evangelism and maintaining unity in the congregation. Lest anyone object that I used the word "mandatory", let me point out that congregations and individuals, who advocated such innovations, thought they were so needful that they divided the church over them. The argument that they were just a "method" or an option doesn't fly because you don't divide the church over an "option." Advocating even a matter of moral or doctrinal indifference to the point of division is a sin.

Romans 14:15-16

¹⁵ Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil;

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Romans 14:19-20

¹⁹ Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. ²⁰ Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense.

1 Corinthians 8:9-12

⁹ But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. ¹⁰ For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? ¹¹ And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? ¹² But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

1 Corinthians 10:31-33

³¹ Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. ³² Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, ³³ just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

But the problem is, the apostles didn't view such things are necessary. The social gospel casts the apostles and the first century Christians into an "unspiritual" light. Listen to the following statement: 'The Jerusalem church ... had no youth minister, no family-life center, no activities director, no day-care center, no choir, no band, no orchestra, no music minister; it had no soccer field nor gymnasium; it had no marriage counselor, no senior's minister, and no chariot ministry.' (*Guardian of Truth*, 'Full Service Churches', Irvin Hummel, 4-2-92, p. 24) You see, the social gospel or liberalism makes the first century churches look like they weren't on the cutting edge. It makes the apostles look apathetic, unspiritual and "lacking vision", for they never advocated such ideas. Liberalism is forced to condemn the Christianity practiced in the first century, for it was completely void of all the things that people claim the church can't survive, grow and minister to the needs of Christians and non-Christians without.

E. The Building Isn't Sacred

Points to Note

You would be hard pressed to find a group of people who have spent more time and effort in trying to teach people that the "building" isn't the "church", than conservative brethren. Many of us even phrase our signs, 'The church of Christ meets here'.

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Listen to the following: 'He accuses us of believing in the sacredness of the building, yet it is institutional churches who often hold "dedication services" when they build a new building. That sounds like they believe the building is sacred!' (*Guardian of Truth*. 'Fellowship Halls', Dick Blackford, 1-19-95, p. 17).

While the building isn't "holy ground" at the same time it must be recognized that since it was purchased with first day of the week funds, it can only be used for those things outlined as the work of the church in the New Testament. That is, the building can be used for edification ([Hebrews 10:24-25](#)) (i.e. worship/bible study/song leading classes, etc.), evangelism ([1 Timothy 3:15](#)) (gospel meetings, preaching, etc.) and benevolence for Christians. ([1 Corinthians 16:1-2](#)).

Hebrews 10:24-25

24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

1 Timothy 3:15

15 but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

1 Corinthians 16:1-2

1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: 2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.

F. The Claim That We Contradict Ourselves

A huge "theological" proposition in recent years has been whether or not it is right to eat a meal in the "church building" ... This writer knows of a case where brethren were involved in building a new meeting place. As they worked each

week, they had lunch in the partially completed structure. The day they moved into the facility to worship, eating on the premises became a sin...' (*The Spiritual Sword*, 'The Crisis of Radical Reactionism.' Wayne Jackson. 10-93) First of all I want to point out that Wayne Jackson has written some excellent material. Unfortunately, on this issue he has found himself defending something that can't be defended. And when you place yourself in such a position, you are forced to make an argument which will come back to haunt you.

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Using the above argument others could just as easily contend: This writer knows a case where brethren were involved in building a meeting place. As they worked some of them listened to music on the radio. The day they moved into the facility, rock and instrumental music in the worship services became a sin! Or, what if one of the brothers had instructed another in some aspect of construction while the building was in progress? Can the church then use the building to teach classes on electrical wiring or plumbing? 'The day they moved in the facility to worship, teaching drywall classes on the premises became a sin.' Or, what if while installing and testing the baptistery for leaks, one of the members laid back and relaxed in the cool waters to get relief from the heat? 'The day they moved into the facility it became wrong for the church to provide a place to swim!' You see brethren, the issue has never been can the church have a drinking fountain, can the preacher eat his lunch in the building while studying, can the members bring a drink or snack into the building while working on a classroom room, copying off materials, cleaning the building, etc... Anyone can see that such things are vastly different from purposely designing a room for people to eat or recreate in.

But in this whole discussion a REAL CONTRADICTION is often overlooked. Think about this one: If a church can build an auditorium which will function as not only the place in which to hold worship services, but will then easily convert into a gym or dining hall after services. Then why can't the same congregation build a large baptistery, which will not only be used to baptize people in, but can also be used to swim in. Hey, if people accept the argument that eating together is necessary for real spiritual growth, then why can't we equally argue that a "Church of Christ hot tub" is necessary for congregational harmony?

End references to [ix]

As we close the reader should note that many who embrace "fellowship" halls and church kitchens are in opposition to church gyms. But such a position is contradictory. Calling a church dining room a "fellowship" hall doesn't make it

any more Scriptural than calling a church gym, a "Family Life Center". Biblical authority can't be cited for either. The above arguments are desperate attempts to hold on to an unscriptural practice. 'It plays well to an audience determined to have their banquet halls at ALL COST, regardless that it serves to perpetuate division.' (Dick Blackford, p. 19).

Proper Respect For Authority

Proper respect for authority cannot be turned on and off. Some appease their conscience by saying, "We don't have a multimillion dollar, state-of-the-art

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fellowship hall. We just use one of the back classrooms for a potluck every now and then." That is a justification I find hard to swallow. The big deal about eating in the building is not just the unauthorized expenditure of money from the church treasury, funds that could be used for spreading the gospel or helping needy saints (Phil. 4:15-16). It is the irreverent attitude toward the Scriptures, an attitude that allows many to speak where the Bible is silent and to act when no approved example is given. When Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 18:18), that implies that He didn't leave any for us with which to speculate and assume. If you respect what He said about believing and being baptized, you must also respect what is said about the church that He built. He is either Lord of all or nothing at all. (*Eating in the Building - What's the Big Deal?* Bubba Garner 03/03/16 - *Rethinking Old Issues*)

Soup Kitchens or Food Service Facilities and Food Pantries

We have been studying about the different institutions that churches build in order to bring people into the church. The New Testament church never built any kind of institution or established any social program to attract people to the church so that they could "share the gospel" with them once they got them in the door. You do not read of a soup kitchen in the New Testament church. In fact, it was just the opposite.

1 Corinthians 11:34

³⁴ But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.

The problem with soup kitchens, gymnasiums, fellowship halls, and other social programs that churches enter into is that they siphon off money from the treasury.

Some estimate that organized religious organizations spend over 4.7 Billion dollars annually on charity.

The world is starving for preachers. There are a lot of preachers that want to preach, but cannot find support. While churches are spending thousands upon thousands of dollars to build and maintain recreational facilities for people to “play” in, men and women are dying lost in sin because they had no one to teach them the truth. The money spent on these social programs should be used as God intended it, to support evangelism and spread the gospel.

Five Billion dollars per year would support 100,000 preachers at 50,000 dollars per year! If Jesus and 12 apostles could upset the whole world, (Acts 17:6), imagine how much gospel could be preached with 100,000 extra preachers?

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Soup kitchens and food pantries are a fiscal and physical burden on the church. They are expensive to establish and maintain as well as to staff. Even with volunteer staff, you still have to maintain a building, have tables and chairs, stoves, refrigeration, dishes, utensils, permits, water, electricity, and the list goes on and on.

Without sounding impersonal, the spread of communicable diseases from sick visitors to other visitors and staff cannot be discounted.

Churches must be careful when they decide to become a food pantry. A lot of towns will require the church to maintain a certain inventory, purchased at the church's expense, and also have a list of items that are to be included in the “gift bag” handed out to anyone that requests one. Sometimes, not having these items can put your tax free status in jeopardy. Free loaders can call and report you if they do not feel they were treated properly or given the items they want.

Some churches will give out gift card instead of maintaining a food pantry. Gift cards can be used to buy alcohol and tobacco products, as well as anything else the person wants. This is the same as handing out cash and serves as an enabler to recipient's vices.

This brings us to the heart of the situation. As well intentioned and compassionate as Christians are, you simply cannot just hand out money and food indiscriminately. Not only does it violate the New Testament pattern of benevolence, it enables the person to continue in their current lifestyle. If a person is getting along okay living off of the charity of others, there is no incentive for them to get a job and get themselves out of that situation.

The world has always had poor people and the world has always had lazy people.

2 Thessalonians 3:7-12

⁷For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; ⁸nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, ⁹not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. ¹⁰For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. ¹¹For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. ¹²Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

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Matthew 26:11

¹¹For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always.

There is no amount of benevolence the church can do that will overcome all of the world's needs. America has spent more money on social programs than any nation that has ever existed. Our nation is deep in debt due to these programs and yet there are still poor people in this country. Many are there of their own choosing. Throwing money at a problem does not solve the problem. You have to fix the root of the problem. You hear people say all of the time "why should I work at McDonalds making minimum wage when I can make just as much on government assistance"? And, they are right. The momma bird will eventually kick the young chick out of the nest. It will fly or lay on the ground and die, but she will not attend to it once she kicks it out. In most cases, the baby bird takes the hint and flies away to begin taking care of itself.

Sometimes people have to be treated the same way. You cannot let the lazy and addicted people spend what money they have on their personal vices and then come to the church to be fed.

What is really sad is when the people with addictions, or that are just plain lazy, have children they are not providing for.

It is not insignificant to note that both God and Jesus worked on this earth. God spent six days creating it then He rested.

Genesis 2:2

² And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.

Matthew 13:54-55

⁵⁴ When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, "Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? ⁵⁵ Is this not the carpenter's son?"

I am sure that Jesus would have worked hard during his early years with chores and probably working with Joseph. When we say that Jesus came to this earth and lived as a man, He really did. How then can any of us think that we should not work? You may not have your "dream" job, but you can work at something while you pursue the job you really want.

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1 Timothy 5:8

⁸ But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

1 Timothy 5:16

¹⁶ If any believing man or^[b] woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.

I think it is fairly clear that if the church is not to be burdened supporting Christian widows that non-believers should not be supported at all.

If we distribute benevolence from the church treasury to people who are not faithful Christians, we go beyond the limits of God's Word and we are separated from God by this sin.

2 John 9-11

⁹ Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; ¹¹ for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

Discussion Questions

- 1. Do you believe that the church should have a “Fellowship Hall”? _____
- 2. Has the word “Fellowship” been used as a social event in the Bible? _____
- 3. Acts 2:46 – the people broke bread from? _____
- 4. Do you believe that the church is in the amusement business? _____
- 5. Do you believe that having a fellowship hall will help the church to grow? _____
- 6. If it were to cause growth, would it be the right kind of growth? _____
Explain: _____
- 7. Is the church building itself sacred? _____
- 8. Do you think we have an obligation to maintain the building in such a manner that it prevents even the appearance of impropriety? _____
- 9. Do you think that we need the proper authority for what the church does and should be careful not to exceed it? _____
- 10. Should the church have and maintain a food pantry for either its members or for people that are not members? _____
- 11. Do you believe that the church should hand out gift cards to members or non-members that just ask for them? _____
- 12. What does Matthew 26:11 say about the poor? _____

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- 13. Can the church feed the entire community? _____
- 14. Should the church maintain a soup kitchen to feed people that are “on the street”? _____
- 15. Do people that take handouts from the church come back and attend the services? _____

Additional Notes:

Case Studies to Explore

Case Number 1

Member number one and their spouse are members of the church. They are very faithful and always willing to participate in the leading services and teaching Bible classes. Member number one has other family members that attend the same church. Along the way member number one needs financial help for an appliance that has broken in their home. Member number one's family has the financial means to help out their immediate family member but has not done so. The appliance is one that the family needs to be able to provide meals for their family, e.g. stove, or refrigerator. The church hears of this need and the men meet to discuss whether or not to make a benevolent gift from the church treasury. In the discussion, the family member with the means to help their immediate family member, e.g. child, sibling, or other close family member, agrees that the church should make the benevolent gift. The men do not ask the family member with the financial means to help if they are willing to take on this expense. The discussion immediately turns to a mutual agreement that the church should write a check to the needy family from the church treasury. From what we have studied:

- a. Should the church offer benevolence to this family? _____
- b. Would it be sinful for the church to do so? _____
- c. Should the matter have ever made it to the knowledge of the church or should the family member with means taken care of it? _____
- d. Should the family member with means have spoken up at the business meeting and offer to take care of the need? _____
- e. If the family member with means does not step up and take care of this need, should the men confront that member? _____
- f. If the member with means still does not assist their family member should the church then help the needy family? _____
- g. If the family member with means does not assist their immediate family with their need, should the church take disciplinary action against the member that will not provide for their own? _____

Thoughts? _____

Case Number 2

Member number one is a member that is very active in the church. He or she teaches Bible class and rarely misses a service. Member number one has an unbelieving spouse. The family falls upon hard times and needs some financial support short term. Is it permissible for the church to make a benevolent contribution to the family? _____

Thoughts? _____

Case Number 3

Member number one is a female member that is very active in the church. She teaches Bible class and rarely misses a service. Member number one has an unfaithful husband. He may attend the occasional service, but as rule would rather be hunting or fishing. The family falls upon hard times and needs some financial support short term. Is it permissible for the church to make a benevolent contribution to the family? _____

Thoughts? _____

Case Number 4

Member number one is a female member that is very active in the church. She teaches Bible class and rarely misses a service. Member number one has an unbelieving husband. The husband is probably able to work but claims he cannot so he doesn't. There is certainly something he could do if he was willing. The wife is the sole provider for the family. They may or may not have children. She becomes sick or loses her job. The family falls upon hard times and needs some financial support short term. Is it permissible for the church to make a benevolent contribution to the family? _____

Thoughts? _____

Case Number 5

Member number one is a female member that comes to worship service almost every Sunday. She usually comes in late and never makes Bible study. Member number one has an unbelieving husband and unbelieving children. The family falls upon hard times and needs some financial support short term. Is it permissible for the church to make a benevolent contribution to the family? _____

Thoughts? _____

Case Number 6

Member number one is a male member that is fairly active in the church. He teaches Bible class if asked and rarely misses a service. Member number one has an unbelieving wife. She does not attend services. The family falls upon hard times and needs some financial support short term. Is it permissible for the church to make a benevolent contribution to the family? _____

Thoughts? _____

Case Number 7

Member number one is a male member that is fairly active in the church. He teaches Bible class if asked and rarely misses a service. Member number one has a wife that has not yet been baptized. However, she attends every service and even comes if the husband is ill. The family falls upon hard times and needs some financial support short term. Is it permissible for the church to make a benevolent contribution to the family? _____

Thoughts? _____

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Case Number 8

Member number one seems to have a permanent dark cloud. Every time a member turns around they are being asked for a “loan”. At what point does the Christian say no? Thoughts? _____

Case Number 9

It is nearing Easter or Christmas. Some of the members thought it would be a good idea to send some of the teenagers to see a movie or a local play about Easter or Christmas. Perhaps the movie, “The Passion of the Christ” is playing. The members think the church should pay for the tickets and the refreshments. There are several parts to this case.

- Do you believe the church should even advocate that the young teens go see such a movie? _____
- Do you believe that the church should not encourage this attendance as the Church of Christ does not celebrate these days? _____
- Would you allow your child to go as part of the group? _____
- Would you take your child to such an event privately? _____
- If the children went as part of a “church” group, do you think the church can pay for the tickets? _____
- Do you have a scripture to support your position? _____

Case Number 10

It is nearing summer. Some of the members think it would be a good idea for the “church” to send some of the kids to a “Christian” camp.

- Do you believe these camps are good for the kids? _____
- Do you believe the church has scriptural authority to send the kids to summer camp? _____
- If not, do you believe the members of the church can get together personally and send the kids to camp? _____
- Do you have a scripture to support your position? _____

Case Number 11

The church is thinking of building a new building. Some of the members would like to put a kitchen in the building so that meals can be prepared for pot luck and other gatherings. Some of the members do not feel that a church should have a kitchen and that the members should not eat in the church building.

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- Do you believe that churches should have kitchens? _____
- Do you believe that Christians should eat in the church building? _____
- Would you support putting a kitchen in the new building even if it violated the conscience of the members who feel there should not be a kitchen in the church building? _____
- Is the want of a kitchen in the church building worth risking your soul if it causes a brother or sister to leave the church? _____
- Do you have a scripture to support your position? _____

Case Number 12

A neighboring church wants to have a singing. They have invited members from the area to join them in an evening of “fellowship and worship”. They plan to have a meal available which is paid for with church money.

- Do you believe that it looks proper to have a meal in the church? _____
- Are you concerned with the example this portrays? _____
- Do you believe that you are showing your support for these activities by attending the event? _____
- Do you have a scripture to support your position? _____

Case Number 13

A neighboring church wants to have an old fashioned ice cream social. They have invited members from the area to join them in an evening of “fellowship and worship”. They plan to have a variety of sweets available which are paid for with church money.

- Do you believe that it looks proper to have this event in the church? _____
- Are you concerned with the example this portrays? _____
- Do you believe that you are showing your support for these activities by attending the event? _____
- Do you have a scripture to support your position? _____

Case Number 14

A neighboring church wants to have a game night. They have invited members from the area to join them in an evening of “fellowship and fun”. They plan to have snacks available which are paid for with church money.

- Do you believe that it looks proper to have this event in the church? _____
- Are you concerned with the example this portrays? _____
- Do you believe that you are showing your support for these activities by attending the event? _____

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- Do you have a scripture to support your position? _____

Case Number 15

You believe the church building is just a building. The local Girl Scouts or Boy Scouts would like to use the building for their meetings. They are willing to pay rent if necessary. However, with the local politics of the Scouts, they are condoning activities that are not in keeping with the scriptures.

- Do you believe that it looks proper to have this event in the church? _____
- Do you believe that the scouts attending their meetings in the church building feel that the church must approve of what is being taught by the scoutmaster if we allow them to meet in our building? _____
- Are you concerned that a neighbor seeing the scouts having a meeting in our building and knowing what the philosophy of the scouts is, must think that the church condones and supports those ideals? _____
- Do you believe that the reputation of the church could be damaged by allowing this activity? _____
- Do you have a scripture to support your position? _____

Case Number 16

You believe the church building is just a building. A member wants to get married in church. The intended spouse of the member is not a member of the church. The family wants an organ to play the music for the wedding. They are willing to rent an organ and have it delivered on Friday and picked up on Monday.

- Do you believe that it looks proper to have this event in the church? _____
- Would you feel the same way if both were Christians? _____

- Do you believe that the church should allow the organ to be delivered on Friday and picked up on Monday? _____
- Are you concerned about the language and behavior of those attending the wedding who are not Christians? _____
- What would happen to the reputation of the church if a visitor from out of town walked into the services on Sunday morning and saw the organ or piano on the podium and turned around and left without saying anything to anyone? _____
- Do you have a scripture to support your position? _____

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- [iii] Rogers, Heath; The Christian and the Lord's Money.
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- [viii] <http://www.lavistachurchofchrist.org/LVarticles/FellowshipHalls.html>