

## Church Benevolence

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by Wayne S. Walker

As religious bodies begin to apostatize, one of the major areas to be corrupted is **the work of the church**. Most denominational groups view their mission to include the material betterment of the people of the world and seek to accomplish this through various church-related agencies and organizations. The Lord's people are always tempted to become like those around them (cf. 1 Samuel 8:5). As churches of Christ faced division in the middle part of last century, one of the wedges that was driven between brethren involved benevolent work: supporting unbelievers with the Lord's money, using sponsoring churches and human institutions to offer benevolence, and begging money from other churches to finance such work. Let's look at a few passages which deal with this problem.

In Acts 2:44-45, KJV and 4:34-37, KJV, we have the first accounts of aid by the church to the needy. Our progressive brethren would argue that the word *"all"* here in Galatians 6:10 includes the same people, so that the church can relieve unbelievers. We find, however, that *"all men"* in 2:45 refers back to *"all that believed"* in verse 44. And in 4:35 *"every man"* is qualified by *"among them"* (verse 34). **No unbelievers received support from the church in these verses.**

In Acts 6:1-8, KJV, we find the ministration of the Grecian widows. They were in *"the number of the disciples"* (verse 1). The brethren chose seven men (often called deacons) to attend to this matter. Notice that the church at Jerusalem did not build a widows' home nor set itself up as a sponsoring church for them and then write letters to other places asking for funds to help them in this work. Here the local church supported its own needy members directly as it had ability.

Acts 11:27-30 is an account of a famine in Judaea. The churches of Judaea did not have the ability to meet their needs so the church in Antioch decided to send relief *"unto the brethren"* (verse 29). Now I would suppose that there were more than saints who were in need in Judaea, as there were after the Gulfport hurricane, the Lubbock tornado, and the Nigerian war, etc. But the text specifies that the relief was sent to *"the brethren."* Neither was there any sponsoring church. The relief was sent by the hands of Barnabas and Saul directly from Antioch to the elders of the Judaeian churches.

Romans 15:25-28, 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, and 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 are passages that refer to another famine in the area of Jerusalem. We see that the brethren of Macedonia and Achaia sent relief to *"the saints"* (2 Corinthians 8:5, etc.) at Jerusalem. There is no mention of a sponsoring church. Another important point to understand is that although Paul mentioned their deep poverty, these churches did not beg. Poverty here does not mean that they did not have enough money to give and had to beg. Rather it indicates that even though they did not have a great amount of funds, they gave what they could, like the widow of Mark 12:41-44. However, today we find that many churches sponsoring benevolent work and many benevolent institutions are constantly begging money from other churches to support them. There is no scriptural authority for such a practice.

As we examine the passages which deal with church benevolence, we see that it is a far simpler matter than what many brethren make of it. Each local church takes care of its own needy according to its own ability. If it is not able to do so, other churches may send directly to the needy church that the wants of its destitute members can be met. There were never any sponsoring churches to come between the giving and receiving congregations, nor were there any benevolent institutions to usurp the work of the church. If we deny the pattern and go beyond what God has said in this matter, we can easily deny the need for authority in any matter. We might as well throw the whole Book out. When brethren quit seeking authority for these seemingly minor matters such as church benevolence, the door is open for every innovation which the mind of man can think of.

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