

Bible Authority (10): Work of the Church (Part 3): Benevolence

I Timothy 5:3-16

I. INTRODUCTION: I

I. **2** We have been discussing Bible authority as it relates to the work of the church.

A. The New Testament teaches the church has a threefold mission; or work:

(1) Evangelism: I Tim. 3:15; I Thess. 1:6-8

(2) Edification: Eph. 4:15-16

(3) Benevolence: Acts 4:34-35; 11:27-30; I Cor. 16:1-2; Rom. 15:25-26

B. ****** Over the past 60-70 years most of the divisions among churches of Christ have revolved around departures from the divinely authorized work of the church.

(1) Evangelism: e.g., Missionary society, sponsoring church arrangement (radio/TV programs, preacher support), carnal inducements

(2) Edification: Church-sponsored social meals, secular education, recreation

(3) Benevolence: General benevolence out of the church treasury, benevolence as an aid to evangelism, church-supported benevolent institutions (e.g., orphan homes)

C. **3** In our last two lessons we focused on the church's work of evangelism and edification:

(1) Evangelism: I Tim. 3:15; Acts 8:4; 11:22-24; 13:1-3; 15:36; Phil. 4:15-16; I Thess. 1:8

(a) Preachers are authorized to receive support: I Cor. 9:14; 2 Cor. 11:8

(b) The New Testament pattern for the support of preachers is very clear!

✦ No missionary society! 2 Jn. 9; I Pet. 5:3; Acts 20:28

✦ No sponsoring church! 2 Jn. 9; I Pet. 5:3; Acts 20:28

✦ Support sent directly to preacher! **Phil. 4:14-16**: "Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress. 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."; 2 Cor. 11:8 **This IS God's pattern for evangelism!**

(2) ****** Edification.

(a) After our conversion we must grow in the faith, and that involves edification.

Matt. 28:19-20: "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."

(b) Edification involves our spiritual growth: Phil. 2:12; 2 Pet. 1:3-11

(c) The church is to edify itself! **Eph. 4:16**: "from 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."

(i) God has so endowed, organized and equipped the church it is able to completely accomplish the task of edification.

- (ii) Whatever is needed to accomplish the task of edification (i.e., expediencies or aids such as place, provisions, and personnel) is divinely authorized.
- (iii) The church can't abdicate its responsibility insofar as edification is concerned by turning over that responsibility to man-made institutions (e.g., colleges).
- (d) Bible does not specify how, when, or where we are to be taught.
 - ☛ "when ye come together" on the Lord's Day (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2).
 - ☛ "continuing daily in the apostle's doctrine..." (Acts 2:42, 46).
- (e) Thus, we have the authority for Bible classes any day, or time of day, we choose; we have authority to hold gospel meetings, lectureships, etc.
- (f) But, the church is authorized to teach only one thing: the Bible (1 Tim. 3:15; Acts 2:42); the church is not authorized to use its resources for the purpose of secular education (e.g., the "three Rs").
 - (i) Just because a secular school teaches the Bible, doesn't mean it is scriptural for the church to send it money.
 - (ii) This has been a source of division for many decades among churches of Christ.
 - (iii) The Lord and His people are not against secular education; the point is simply that churches in the NT didn't build secular schools, nor did they send money from the church treasury to support secular schools of any kind.
 - (iv) This doesn't mean individual Christians can't band together, pool their resources and operate a secular school; and even teach the Bible in such a school. But there is no scriptural authority for any local church to support such a school from its treasury.
- 2. **4** Divine authority is a must for all we teach, preach and practice! Col. 3:17
 - A. We cannot take divine authority lightly or trifle with it (even if we judge the results as "good"); because to do so is showing great disrespect to God! Lev. 10:1-3
 - 2 Jn. 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."
 - B. Sooner or later we will be faced with situations where brethren are not satisfied to abide by divine authority ("forewarned is forearmed"); this study is not "majoring in minors"!
- 3. **5** We continue our study of **Bible Authority: Work of the Church (Part 3): Benevolence.**

II. DISCUSSION:

I. **6** Introduction to benevolence:

- A. By benevolence, we mean: the authority for the church to use money from its treasury to help those who are in need.
 - (1) That the church has a benevolent work, a benevolent responsibility; is pretty much a "no brainer."
 - (2) However, the church's responsibility in this arena has been the subject of much controversy, especially over the past several decades (since late 1940s).
- B. ****** What guides us?

- (1) Tragically, when it comes to the church's responsibility in benevolence most let their emotions guide them (Prov. 14:12; Jer. 10:23; Num. 20:1ff; 1 Chr. 13:11; 15:13).
- (2) The New Testament says, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." (Col. 3:17)
- (3) **ALL** we do must be guided by Scripture; we cannot let emotions get the better of us! Col. 3:17; Rom. 4:3; 1 Pet. 4:11; 2 Tim. 3:16-17
- (4) ** 1 Corinthians 2:9-11:

1 Cor. 2:9-11: "But as it is written:

'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.'

10 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God."

- (a) What God has revealed in the New Testament are "the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."
- (b) Therefore, if we really do "love Him" we will follow the New Testament pattern in **ALL** things!
- (c) If we follow the pattern in worship and organization; why not do so when it comes to benevolence?!
- (d) If we allow emotion to rule us and do not follow the NT pattern regarding the church's limited responsibility in benevolence; we forfeit any claim to loving God (Jn. 8:31; Jn. 15:14; 2 Jn. 9).

2. **7 New Testament reveals two realms of benevolent responsibility** (1 Tim. 5:3-16):

A. Responsibilities of individual Christians:

- (1) **V. 4:** "But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God."
- (2) **V. 16:** "If 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."
- (3) ** Please note Christians are condemned if we do not discharge our **individual benevolent** responsibility (**V. 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.")
- (4) These three verses (4, 16, 8) plainly and explicitly teach:
 - ☛ If Christians have family members that are widows; they have the **first** responsibility to care for their needs before the church gets involved.
 - ☛ There is a clear distinction between individual responsibility versus church responsibility.
 - ☛ Individual Christian cannot relinquish their benevolent responsibilities and expect the church to discharge them.
 - ☛ And, the church has no authority to take on the benevolent responsibilities of the individual Christian.

B. 8 Responsibilities of the local church:

- (1) **V. 16:** *"If 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."*
 - (a) The local church only has a benevolent responsibility towards widows who are "really widows."
 - (b) That is, widows with no family members to care for them.
- (2) ****** Very importantly, note also that for a widow to become the benevolent responsibility of the local church she must meet very specific qualifications:
 - (a) She must be destitute (vv. 4-5).
 - (b) She must have no one in her family upon which to depend (v. 4).
 - (c) She must be faithful in worship (v. 5).
 - (d) She must live godly in life and character (vv. 5, 7).
 - (e) She must be 60 years of age or older (v. 9)(Paul states reasons in vs. 11-15.)
 - (f) She must have been benevolent and faithful in good works (v. 10).
 - (g) She must have brought up children (v. 10).
 - (h) She must have been the wife of one man (v. 9)(A woman is "*the wife of one man*" when she is scripturally married, regardless of the number of scriptural marriages (cf. Rom. 7:3). Does not mean she can never have more than one scriptural marriage, see v. 14.)

C. ** Summary of 1 Tim. 5:3-16: This New Testament passage:

- (1) Clearly defines a "pattern" for benevolence (cannot let our emotions rule!).
- (2) Clearly distinguishes between the benevolent responsibilities of individual Christians and the local church.
- (3) Clearly teaches the individual Christian has certain benevolent responsibilities that cannot be avoided and/or shifted to the local congregation without severe condemnation and consequences (and vice versa).
- (4) Clearly teaches the local congregation has certain benevolent responsibilities for "needy saints" only!

3. 9 Benevolent responsibility of local churches in the New Testament: Rom. 4:3

A. There are three recorded cases of congregational benevolence in the New Testament: Acts 2:44-47; 4: 32-37; 6:1ff; 11: 27-30; 1 Cor. 16: 1-3, 2 Cor. 8, 9, Rom. 15: 25-27.

- (1) **** Jerusalem church cared for its needy** (Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-37; 6:1ff): The very earliest disciples were from many far-flung places and remained in Jerusalem much longer than they originally had planned (cf. Acts 2:9-11).

Acts 2:44-45: *"Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need."*

Acts 4:32-37: *"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**. 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."

Acts 6:1: "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) **** The church in Antioch sent aid to "the brethren which dwelt in Judea"** (Acts 11:27-30): This famine was prophesied to take place "in the days of Claudius Caesar" (v. 28). Claudius reigned from 41-54 A.D. and history records four famines during his reign. Historical writers indicate the famine in 45 A.D. although wide in scope, was particularly severe in Judea (v. 28).

Acts 11:27-30: "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."

- (3) **** Churches of Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia sent aid to "poor saints in Jerusalem"** (1 Cor. 16:1-3; Rom. 15:25-26; 2 Cor. 8, 9). This is a separate case from (Acts 11:27-30; 1 Corinthians not written until 57 or 58 A.D.). The poverty of the "poor saints in Jerusalem" may have been at least partly attributable to "the seizure of your [their] property" mentioned in Heb. 10:32-34 (esp. v. 34: "accepted joyfully the seizure of your property"; NASB).

1 Cor. 16:1-3: "Now concerning the **collection for the saints**, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. 2 On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come. 3 When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem; 4 and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me."

Rom. 15:25-26: "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."

- B. **10** The local church is authorized to have a treasury for such purposes:

1 Cor. 16:1-2: "Now concerning the **collection for the saints**, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. 2 On the first day of **every** week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come."; NASV

In 1 Corinthians 16:2, "in store" is our word treasury; *thesaurizo* (thay-sow-rid'-zo); from "to amass or reserve" (literally or figuratively); lay up (treasure), (keep) in store, (heap) treasure (together, up). From noun *thesauros* (thay-sow-ros') a deposit, i.e. wealth (literally or figuratively)(cf. Jas. 5:3) (Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright (c) 1994, Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, Inc.).

- C. ****** It is critical for us to notice there is a "pattern" concerning the collection and distribution of these funds by the local church.

- (1) Pattern concerning the **purpose** of benevolence. The purpose was to “relieve” a “need” (**Acts 11:29**: “disciples...determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea.”).
- (a) The word “need” means “necessity.”
 - ☛ “they distributed to each as anyone had need” (Acts 4:35).
 - ☛ “your abundance may supply their lack” (2 Cor. 8:14).
 - ☛ “the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints” (2 Cor. 9:12).
 - (b) Very importantly this “need” did not arise because of:
 - ☛ Frivolous spending (Prov. 28:19).
 - ☛ Prodigal living (Prov. 23:20-21; Lk. 15:11-21).
 - ☛ Greedy-minded business ventures (Prov. 28:22).
 - ☛ Materialistic desires (i.e., covetousness, Prov. 21:5, 25-26).
 - ☛ Laziness (Prov. 6:6-11; 2 Thess. 3:6-15).
- (2) ** Pattern concerning the **manner** of giving.
- (a) Contributing was something that “must” be done:
 - ☛ “I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also” (1 Cor. 16:1)
 - ☛ “with much urgency” (2 Cor. 8:4)
 - (b) Collection to be made upon a specific day.
 - ☛ “On the first day of every week” (1 Cor. 16:2 NASB)
 - (c) Every member has the responsibility to give according to their ability, purpose, and prosperity (doesn’t matter how poor, give something! Mk. 12:42-44).
 - ☛ “each one of you lay something aside” (1 Cor. 16:2)
 - ☛ “storing up as he may prosper” (1 Cor. 16:2)
 - ☛ “each according to his ability, determined to send relief” (Acts 11:29)
 - ☛ “according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have” (2 Cor. 8:12)
 - ☛ “as he purposes in his heart” (2 Cor. 9:7)
 - (d) Every member was to give freely, not grudgingly or out of a sense of compulsion.
 - ☛ “one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own” (Acts 4:32)
 - ☛ “freely willing” (2 Cor. 8:3)
 - ☛ “as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation” (2 Cor. 9:5)
 - ☛ “he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Cor. 9:6)
 - ☛ “not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7)
- (3) **II** Pattern concerning the **subjects** of benevolence: always limited to “needy saints.”
- (a) ** Jerusalem church (Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-37; 6:1ff). **

Acts 2: “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.” (vv. 44-45)

- ☛ Who is under consideration? “all who believed and had all things in common” (2:44)
- ☛ What did they do? “sold their possessions and goods” (2:45). Who “sold their possessions and goods”? “all who believed and had all things in common”
- ☛ Then what did they do with the proceeds? They “divided them among all” (2:45). Who divided what among whom? “all who believed and had all things in common” “divided them among all” That is, all who believed divided it among themselves “as anyone had need.”

****Acts 4:** “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.” (vv. 32-35)

- ☛ Who is under consideration? “the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul” (4:32).
- ☛ What was their attitude? “neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own” (4:32). Who said “that any of the things he possessed” was not his own? “those who believed”
- ☛ What did they do? “they had all things in common” (4:32). Who were the “they” who “had all things in common”? “those who believed.”
- ☛ What was the result of the fact that “they had all things in common”? The result was “Nor was there anyone among them who lacked” (4:34). Who did not lack? “anyone among” “those who believed.”
- ☛ Why was this the case? “for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need” (4:34-35).
- ☛ Who were the “all” who sold “lands or houses” and “brought the proceeds of the things that were sold”? “those who believed.”
- ☛ Who was the “anyone” who had “need”? “those who believed” “had all things in common.”

****Acts 6:** “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.” (vv. 6ff)

- ☛ Who is under consideration? “the disciples...their widows [i.e., widows among the Hellenist disciples]” (6:1).
- ☛ What was the problem? “widows neglected in the daily distribution” (6:1). Obvious problem: the Hellenist Christian widows were in need.

- ☛ What did they do? “brethren, seek out from among you [i.e., among you Christians] seven men of good reputation...whom we may appoint over this business.” (6:3) There were needy Christians and Christians among this local church were appointed to make sure the resources of the church were used to relieve these “needy saints.”

(b) **I2** Church in Antioch (Acts 11:27-30):

- ☛ To whom did the “disciples” “determine[d] to send relief”? “to the brethren dwelling in Judea”.

(c) ****** Churches of Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia sent aid to the “poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem” (1 Cor. 16:1-3; Rom. 15:25-26; 2 Cor. 8, 9).

- ☛ What is under consideration? “collection for the saints” (1 Cor. 16:1); “ministering to the saints” (2 Cor. 8:4); “Now concerning the ministering to the saints” (2 Cor. 9:1).
- ☛ What was to be done? “supplies the needs of the saints” (2 Cor. 9:12). Paul said he was “going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints” (Rom. 15:25). What was he taking to Jerusalem? “a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem” (Rom. 15:26).
- ☛ To whom did the brethren in Macedonia and Achaia make a “certain contribution”? “for the poor among the saints.” **STOP**

(4) **I3** Pattern concerning the **distribution** of funds.

Jerusalem relief: (Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-37) was by the elders through the deacons (e.g., Acts 6:1-8).

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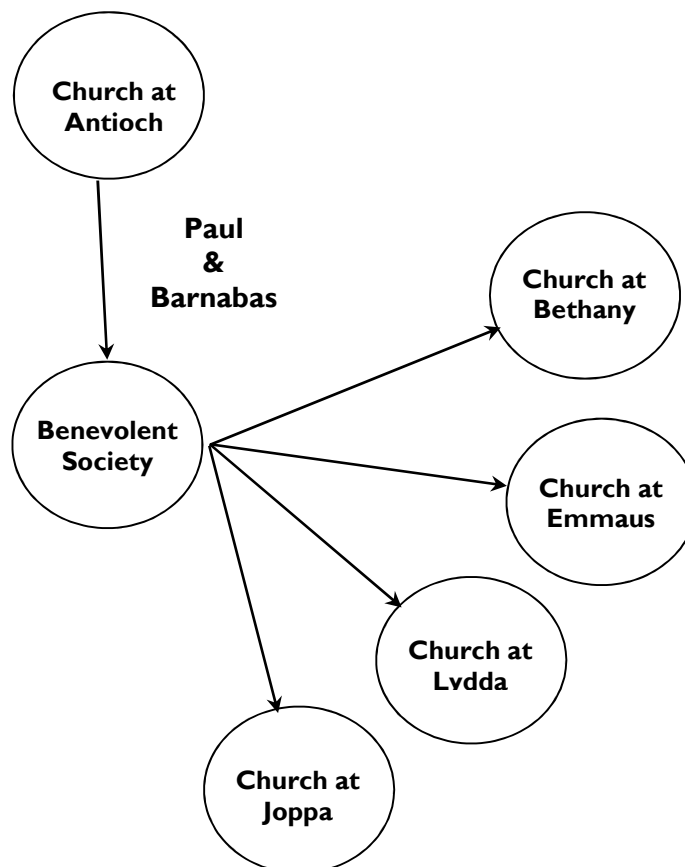


I5 Judean relief: Sent by the “disciples” at “Antioch” (i.e., local church) “to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:30). Thus, funds were delivered “to the elders” among the “brethren in Judea.”

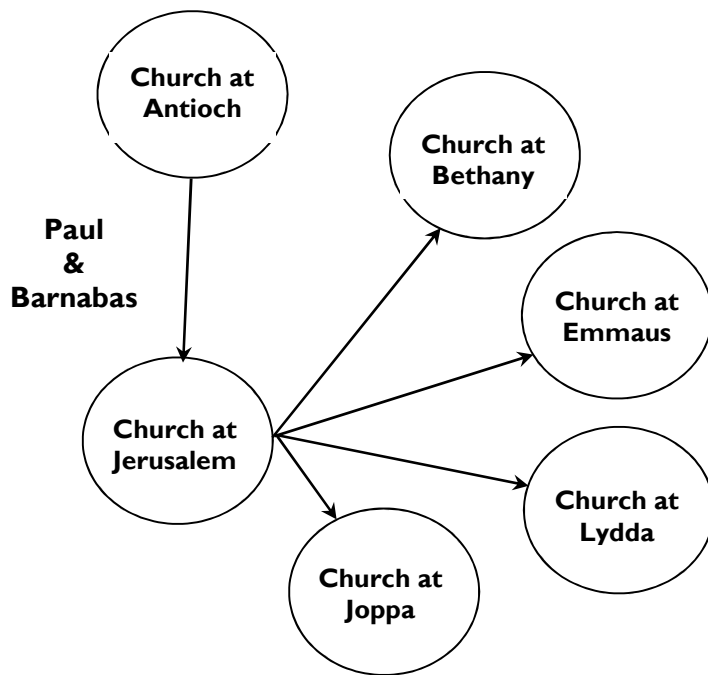
- (a) Elders were appointed “in every church” (Acts 14:23).

- (b) Oversight of the elders limited to “*the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers*” (Acts 20:28); “*the flock of God which is among you*” (1 Pet. 5:2).
- (c) The “*brethren which dwelt in Judea*” comprised more than one local church (1 Thess. 2:14; Gal. 1:22; each passage speaks of “*the churches of Judaea*”; i.e., in the plural).
- (d) Given these facts (a, b, and c) one must necessarily conclude the funds were delivered to the elders of each “Judean” congregation with needy saints; and the elders of each individual church distributed to the needy saints of the congregation in which they served.
- (e) The brethren did not set-up institution separate from the church to oversee this work (no “CoC Benevolent Association,” no “CoC Relief Society”).
- (f) Nor did the brethren designate one local church to oversee the work and control the distribution of funds to the local congregations having needy saints (BTW: this organization, which is not found in scripture, is called the “sponsoring church” arrangement and is commonly used among our liberal brethren.).

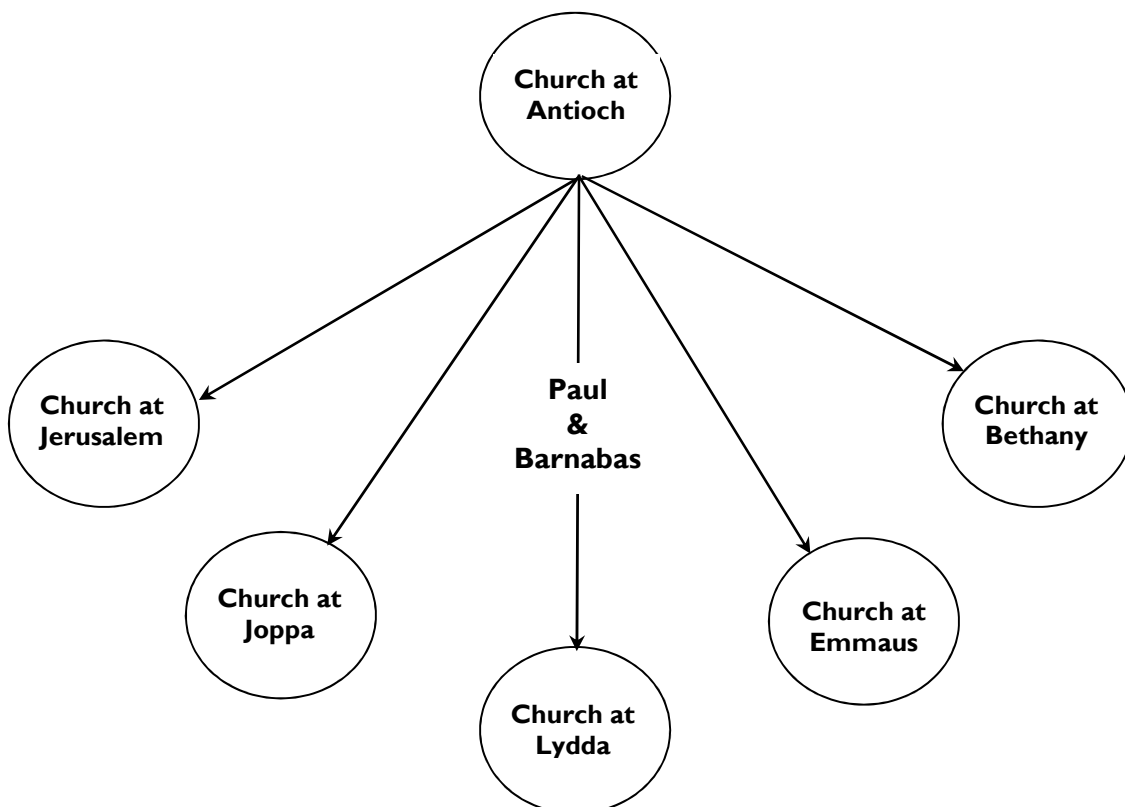
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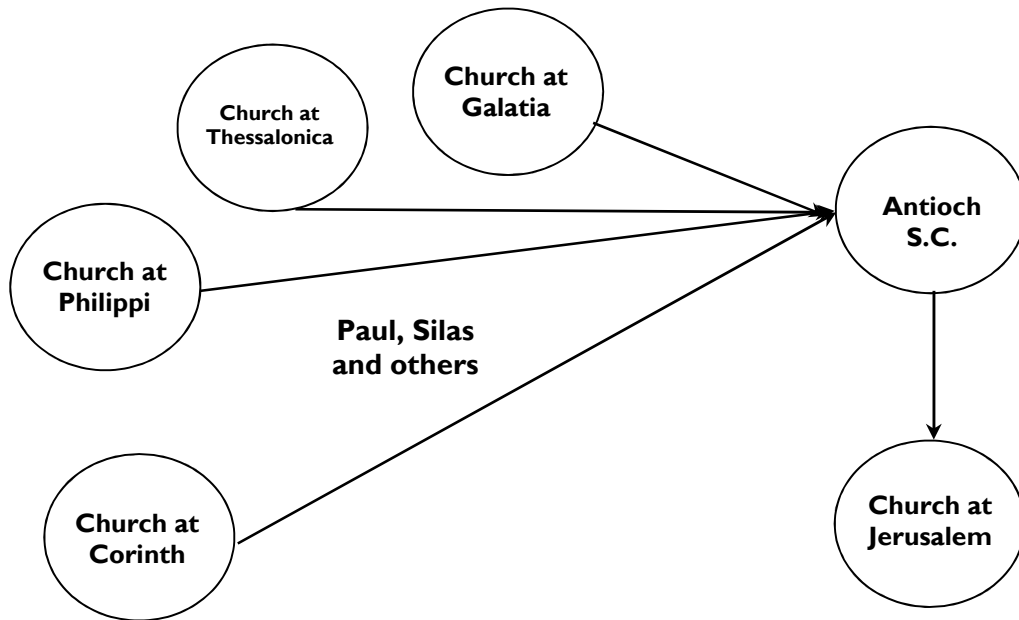


17 BUT THIS (Acts 11:27-30)
Direct from sending church to receiving church

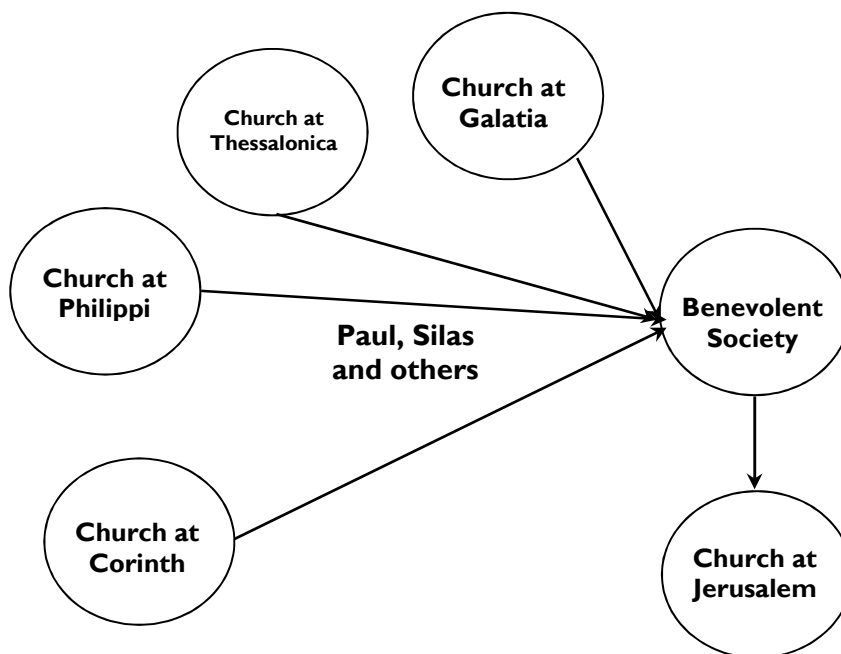


18 **Jerusalem relief:** “them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem” (1 Cor. 16:1-3: “collection for the saints”)

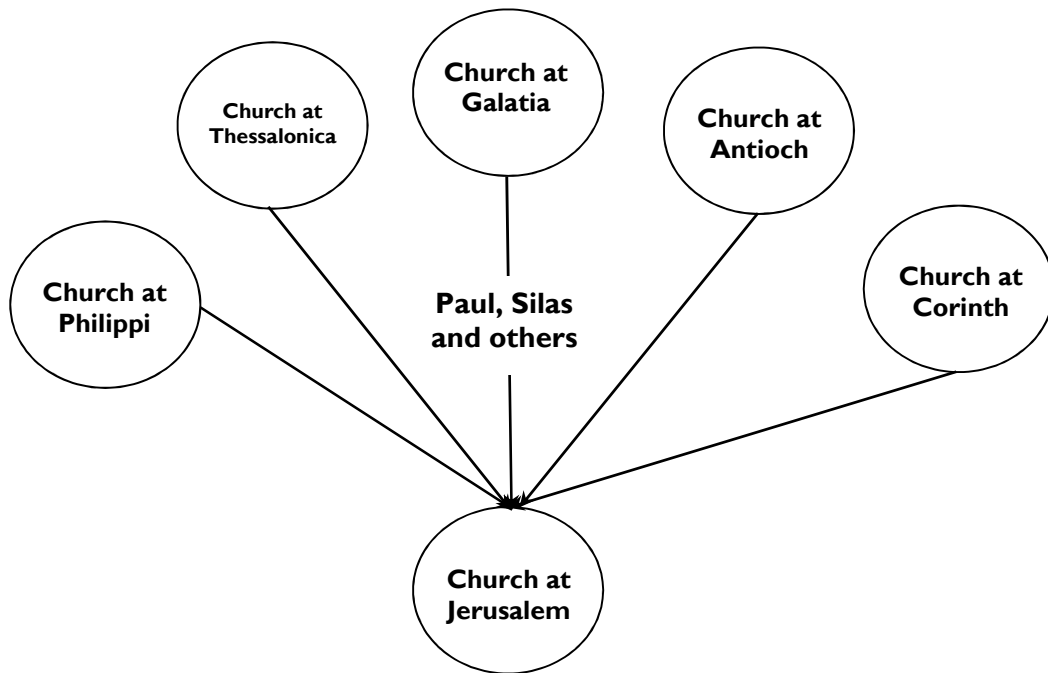
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20 BUT THIS (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8 & 9)
Direct from sending church to receiving church



D. **21 Summary:** Let's review the "pattern":

- (1) **Purpose:** to fulfill the necessities of life for those truly in need. Aid was based upon "needs" existing among "needy saints" in the receiving church.
 - (a) In each New Testament case a real need or emergency arose before other churches were asked to assist (Churches did not create a need and then beg for funds!).
 - (b) The needs were always temporary in nature and benevolence was sent only until the need was relieved.
- (2) **Manner:** On the first day of every week, every member gave cheerfully and abundantly as he purposed in his heart and according to his ability.
 - (a) Funds not raised by bake sales, bingo games, car washes, beer tents, or raffling off a Buick.
 - (b) Funds were not collected any other time than on the first day of the week.
 - (c) Christians did not "tithe" nor was the amount they gave based on some man-made formula (e.g., Methodist Church).
- (3) **Subjects:** "needy saints" only.
 - (a) God did not design the local church to be a *Red Cross Society*, community food bank, etc. for the general public. For example, in Acts 11, the dearth was widespread (**v. 28**: "*great famine throughout all the world*"), but only needy saints were helped from the church treasury (**v. 29**: "*send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea*").

- (b) Some argue “benevolence is an aid to evangelism,” “After all, people won’t care how much we know until they know how much we care.” (They often use John 6 where Jesus fed the 5,000 to support this argument.) The very passage used to justify this concept, in reality, does the exact opposite (Jn. 6:26-27, 66-67).

Jn. 6:26-27: *“Jesus answered them and said, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. 27 Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.’”*

Jn. 6:66-67: *“From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. 67 Then Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Do you also want to go away?’”*

- (i) Most who use “benevolence as an aid to evangelism” never get around to evangelizing!
 - (ii) Human wisdom is not our source of authority (Prov. 14:12; don’t fall for the emotionalism inherent in this argument!).
 - (iii) The gospel is what God uses to call men to salvation, not food or other carnal attractions (see Rom. 1:16-17; 10:17; 2 Thess. 2:13-14).
 - (iv) If the church uses “food, fun, and frolic” to ‘attract’ people; they will have to use “food, fun, and frolic” to keep them! Not the gospel!
 - (v) That the local church cannot scripturally aid non-believers from its treasury does not mean individual Christians don’t have responsibilities in this regard (more on this later).
- (4) **Distribution:** “sent it to the elders” (Acts 11:30)
- (1) No local church both received and sent funds.
 - (2) Funds were sent directly to the elders of the local church to be distributed to the “needy saints” of that congregation. There was no intervening “benevolent society” or “sponsoring church.”

****A failure by the local congregation to follow the New Testament pattern in benevolence has the same ramifications and consequences as not following the New Testament pattern in any other area (e.g., worship, plan of salvation, etc.; recall Lk. 6:46; Matt. 7:21-23).**

4. **22** What does the New Testament teach regarding the benevolent responsibility of individual Christians?

- A. The materialistic attitudes of our society are one of our biggest enemy when it comes to properly discharging our individual benevolent responsibilities.
- (1) If we’re not careful we will be influenced by the world in which we live (1 Cor. 15:33; 1 Jn. 2:15-17); we can get by with far less than most of us think!
 - (2) Christians have a duty to work so that we may extend benevolence to others (**Eph. 4:28:** *“Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.”*).
 - (3) Adverse effects of materialism:

- (a) We overspend on “things” to the point we don’t have anything to give others in need; or we are just apathetic to the needs of others.
- (b) It is easy to become consumed with the “bigger barn” syndrome (Lk. 12:16-21: **vv. 20-21:** *“But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ 21 ‘So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.’”*).
- (c) Some are just downright stingy like the rich young ruler (Mk. 10:17-22).
- (d) Objects of benevolence can have unrealistic expectations (benevolence is meant to supply “needs” not “wants”! e.g., The lady who called me demanding the church buy her a washing machine and dryer!).

B. 23 Scope of individual responsibility:

1 Jn. 3:17-18: *“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? 18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”*

Jas. 2:14-17: *“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and 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? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”*

1 Tim. 6:17-19: *“Command 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. 18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, 19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”*

24 Read: **Matt. 25:31-46**

(1) **25** Family (1 Tim. 5:4, 8, 16)

- (a) We must not let the church be “charged” with our individual benevolent responsibilities, if we fail in this responsibility we have “denied the faith” and are “worse than an infidel” (1 Tim. 5:8 KJV).
- (b) Some counter by saying: “Whatever the church is doing, the individual is doing.” If true, how could the individual Christian in this passage keep the church from being “charged”?

(2) Fatherless and widows (Jas. 1:27). Context of chapter plainly talking about responsibilities of individual Christians:

- (a) **V. 12:** *“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”*
- (b) **V. 13:** *“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man”*
- (c) **V. 14:** *“But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.”*
- (d) **V. 19:** *“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath”*
- (e) **V. 20:** *“For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.”*

- (f) **V. 21:** “Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”
- (g) **V. 22:** “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”
- (h) **V. 23:** “For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass”
- (i) **V. 24:** “For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.”
- (j) **V. 25:** “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”
- (k) **V. 26:** “If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.”
- (l) **V. 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.”

Note: “The word ‘visit’ in this passage does not mean just ‘going by to see’ these destitute widows and fatherless. It embraces the idea of ascertaining their needs and supply them—ministering unto them.” (Cogdill, R. E., *Walking By Faith*, pp. 68-69). It’s not just sending them jars of mustard and boxes of pancake mix!

- (3) **All men** (Lk. 10:25-37: **vv. 36-37:** “So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” 37 And he said, ‘He who showed mercy on him.’”; Matt. 25:31-46; **Gal. 6:10:** “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”).

- (a) Lk. 10:25-37: Obvious refers to individual responsibility. Also, note that for us to extend individual benevolence there must be:

- ☛ Opportunity (vv. 31, 33)
- ☛ Compassion (v. 33)
- ☛ Means (vv. 34-35)

And combined it with action!!

- (b) Matt. 25:31-46: Men will be judged as individuals based on their success or failure to discharge their individual benevolent responsibilities (How sad to follow the truth on all things, yet fall short in benevolence!).
- (c) Gal. 6:10: Many brethren believe this passage refers to congregational action and is not limited to individual action. However, the context of Galatians 6 limits Galatians 6:10 to individual action. Let’s examine the arguments:

Argument #1: “The letter is addressed to churches; therefore, 6:10 refers to congregational responsibility not individual responsibility.” If true, this argument is applicable to every passage in every letter addressed to churches.

- ☛ I Corinthians is addressed to the church at Corinth (I Cor. 1:2), but has **many** things pertaining to individual action, for example: a) sexual relationship of husband and wife (I Cor. 7); b) eating of meats (I Cor. 8-10); c) going to law with a brother (I Cor. 6); d) abstaining from fornication (I Cor. 6:18).
- ☛ The letter to the Galatians is similar in that it is addressed “To the churches of Galatia:” (Gal. 1:2), but has a lot to say concerning individual action, for

example: a) fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23); c) works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21); c) laws of sowing and reaping (Gal. 6:7-8), etc.

- ☛ Argument has no validity. Instructions are often given collectively when only applicable personally.

Argument #2: “Gal. 6:10 uses the plural pronoun ‘we’; therefore; the passage refers to congregational responsibility not individual responsibility.”

Simply look to Gal. 5:25 which uses the plural pronouns “we” and “us” (**Gal. 5:25:** “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”)

- ☛ It is obvious that individual Christians are under discussion in 5:25.
 - ☛ Walking “in the Spirit” is the lifestyle of the individual Christian.
 - ☛ In 6:10 the work of the church is in view ONLY as it considers the *distributive* action of each individual member.
 - ☛ One should read the entire context of chapter 6 beginning in v. 1 and notice the number of times that “he,” “him,” “a man,” and “thysself” are used to see that individual action is clearly under consideration, not congregational action.
 - ☛ Argument has no validity.
- C. For an individual Christian to fail in their duty to the “*fatherless and widows*” or to “*all men*” is no less sinful than shirking our responsibilities to our own family.
- D. Remember, judgment by God will be on an “individual” basis (Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10; Matt. 25:31-46).
- (1) The biggest danger of the liberal position concerning benevolence (i.e., church responsible for benevolence to non-saints) is that it gives one a false sense of security that when we’ve given of our means on the first day of the week that we have discharged our individual responsibility to those in need.
- (2) In reality, by giving of our means on the first day of the week we’ve done no such thing! We have not met the requirements of 1 Timothy 5:8, James 1:27, Matthew 25:31-46, or Galatians 6:10!!!
- (3) ** We can no more turn over our individual benevolent responsibilities to the local church than we can turn over our other individual responsibilities (e.g., responsibilities to assemble and participate in worship, responsibilities of father, husband, wife, mother, or the responsibility to “*keep oneself unspotted from the world*”).

III. CONCLUSION: 26

- I. The Lord has given His church a very simple, yet profound and important, program of work:
 - A. Evangelism: 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Thess. 1:6-8
 - B. Edification: Eph. 4:15-16
 - C. Benevolence: Acts 4:34-35; 11:27-30; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Rom. 15:25-26
2. In this lesson, we’ve considered the work of the church in the realm of benevolence.
 - A. The New Testament makes a clear distinction between the benevolent responsibilities of the local church and individual Christian (1 Tim. 5:16).

- B. Failure to follow the New Testament pattern for church benevolence is no different than failing to follow the New Testament pattern for the work, worship, or organization of the church (2 Jn. 9).
 - C. We can no more *shift* our individual benevolent responsibilities to the church than we can *shift* other individual responsibilities to the church (e.g., attendance, worship, study, etc.).
3. Denominations, and many “churches of Christ,” violate the New Testament pattern for benevolence; both in how funds are raised (1 Cor. 16:1-2) and in how funds are used (e.g., general benevolence to non-saints). This is a sin because:
- A. **27** It violates the New Testament pattern! (1 Pet. 4:11; 2 Jn. 9) We must follow God’s Word in ALL we do! Col. 3:17
 - B. It detracts the church from its primary mission (1 Tim. 3:15; Matt. 28:19-20) and places upon the church a burden it could never meet (**Matt. 26:11**: “...For you have the poor with you always,”).
 - C. It lulls Christians into believing they’ve discharged their God-given ***individual*** benevolent responsibilities when in fact they haven’t.
4. I especially find it atrocious that emotionalisms is often used to demean and denigrate Christians who do follow the NT pattern for benevolence:
- A. “You all are just stingy, cranky, mean-spirited Pharisees!”
 - B. “If we don’t do it this way, the work won’t get done!” (i.e., people’s needs won’t be met)
5. How do we answer?
- A. First, when it comes to congregational benevolence, individual benevolence, or any other matter, we must “Speak where the Bible speaks, and be silent where the Bible is silent.” (1 Pet. 4:11)
 - B. We are not “mean-spirited” and “stingy.” In fact, following God’s pattern for benevolence places a much greater burden of responsibility on His people!
Heb. 13:16: “But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”
Jas. 2:14-17: “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and 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? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”
1 Jn. 3:17-18: “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? 18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”
1 Tim. 6:17-18: “Command 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. 18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share,”
 - C. The work will get done ***if every*** Christian discharges His God-given responsibilities in the way God has directed (Matt. 25:31-46; Gal. 6:10; Jas. 1:27).
 - D. If we fail, we will be judged individually for those failures (Matt. 25:31-46).

6. We must let the church do its work of benevolence according to the New Testament pattern (Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 4:11) and as individual Christians we must follow the pattern God expects of each of us as individuals (1 Jn. 3:17; Jas. 2:15-17; Matt. 25:31-46).

7. Invitation

Adapted, in part, from the workbook *A Study of Authority* by Billy W. Moore (pp. 84-87).

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