

THE N.T. PATTERN IN BENEVOLENCE (RELIEF)

Text: Acts 4:32-35

INTRO: Benevolence is a word that has been tossed about quite a bit by brethren over the years as they seek to understand the Bible principles & precepts regarding the subject of charitable gifts. Benevolence is a big word for charity. If we would “speak as the oracles of God” & call Bible things by Bible names, we would prefer such terms as alms, relief, fellowship, offering, & contribution. Perhaps a more Scriptural terminology would help us remain closer to the Scripture. Remember, the N.T. **is** the pattern, the standard for church action. The church can do what the N.T. says a church can do. Compare Am. Cancer Soc., Heart Fund, Arthritis Foundation, etc. Drug store (motor oil).

Now, let us consider 3 major points:

1. There is a difference between individual responsibility & congregational responsibility in this matter.
2. The N.T. places fewer limitations on individuals than on congregations.
3. We will look at the Scriptures that make up the Divine pattern for congregational alms giving.

I. THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL & CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY IN ALMS GIVING.

- A. Though the congregation is made up of individuals, it is not true that whatever the individual does the church is doing. Matthew 18:15-17.

For in fact the body is not one member but many.
(1 Cor. 12:14).

- B. Individual Christians have responsibilities in the realm of relief that the congregation does not have.
READ I TIMOTHY 5:8, 16

II. THERE ARE FEW LIMITATIONS PLACED ON INDIVIDUAL ALMS GIVING.

- A. We must seek to relieve a legitimate need. Not fall prey to

con men, scams, etc. 2 Thess. 3:10

- B. We must have the means, power, or ability to relieve that need. No one has ability to relieve every need, thus we must be selective, try to make the best use of our opportunities, Mark 14:7; Gal. 6:10.
- C. Our alms should not be distributed in such a way as to support the teaching of religious error.

And have no **fellowship** with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. (Eph. 5:11).

III. THE N.T. PATTERN FOR THE WORK OF THE CHURCH IN THE MATTER OF ALMS OR RELIEF.

- A. First, we need to be aware that this is not the primary work or purpose for which the church exists. With the rise of the “social gospel” many have wrongly concluded that a primary function of churches should be to correct social & political ills. This simply is not so. The primary responsibility of the church is to **preach the gospel** to the lost & to **edify** the saved thru further proclamation of the precepts of Jesus. 1 Tim. 3:15
- B. I believe the responsibility of the church in the area of relief is an outgrowth of the principle of self preservation.
- C. Congregational responsibility in relief falls into 2 categories:
 - 1. A church caring for its own needy members.
 - a. Temporary relief in time of emergency, Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37
 - b. “Permanent” care for those who have no other means of support & who meet certain specific conditions. 1 Tim. 5:9-10.
 - 2. Churches in prosperous conditions should assist destitute congregations to relieve their needy members.
Acts 11:27-30 determined-relief-brethren
Rom. 15:25-28 saints-poor

1 Cor. 16:1-4 saints

2 Cor. 8:4, 14 fellowship-lack (want, KJV)

Now after many years I came to bring alms & offerings to my nation. (Acts 24:17).

D. Some observations.

1. No church or eldership ever “assumed” oversight of any brotherhood-wide relief program.
2. No human organization was ever set up through which churches were to function.
3. In matters of **local** relief, members of the congregation were appointed to act in behalf of the congregation in relieving the need, Acts 6:1-6.
4. In matters of congregations with an abundance supplying relief for needy brethren in other locations, each congregation selected its own messengers to deliver their alms to its destination. Acts 11:30; 1 Cor. 16:3.
5. No N.T. congregation ever came under the oversight of the elders of another congregation in any sense as is common in “sponsoring church” arrangements today.

CONCLUSION: In discussing matters of charity, brethren have not always been charitable toward one another. I’ve preached the gospel for over 35 years & I’ve never met a member of the church who didn’t believe in helping orphans and doing good to those outside the household of faith, but I have known quite a few good-hearted, generous brethren who believe the best & only acceptable way to take care of such needs in or out of the church is to do so in keeping with God’s pattern. I commend to you God’s pattern.

La Porte, TX, January 16, 1983

Exton, PA, May 14, 1980

Susquehanna, Marietta, PA, August 22, 1999

Shiloh, Mexia, TX, October 17, 1999