

Institutionalism

Lesson 6 ñ How Congregations in the New Testament Cooperated

INTRODUCTION:

A. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY THE WORD "COOPERATE?"

1. "1. To act or work together with one another or others for a common purpose. 2. To combine so as to produce an effect." ñ **WEBSTER**.

2. For the sake of the issue, "cooperate" can take on **two meanings**.

1. "To **act jointly** Õ combine or pool funds and centralize their control under one agency as a means of cooperation."

Or contrariwise

2. "To **act independently and concurrently** with each other in separate efforts to accomplish the same goals."

B. THE ISSUE BECOMES, "DID CHURCHES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT COOPERATE, WHEN DID THEY DO IT, AND WHAT LIMITATIONS WERE PUT ON THAT COOPERATION?"

C. THE ISSUE CAN BEST BE SERVED BY A CAREFUL EXAMINATION OF EACH CASE OF COOPERATION THAT WE CAN FIND BETWEEN CHURCHES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, AND BETWEEN CHURCHES AND PREACHERS.

I. THE JUDEAN RELIEF 45 A. D. (**Acts 11:27-30**).

A. BACKGROUND:

1. During the reign of **Claudius**. He began to reign in 41 and Josephus tells us that this famine occurred in the 4th year of his reign ñ about **45 AD**.

2. Shortly after Saul (Paul) arrived in Antioch (**Acts 11:25-26**).

3. Predicted by the prophet **Agabas** (**vs. 28: 21:7-14**).

B. THIS EVENT IS OFTEN CONFUSED AND MIXED WITH THE NEED OF THE POOR SAINTS IN JERUSALEM THAT WE READ OF IN **Romans 15, 1 Corinthians 16, and 2 Corinthians 8-9**. THAT

OCCURRED MANY YEARS LATER, ABOUT **57 OR 58 AD.**

C. HOW DID THE CHURCH IN ANTIOCH COOPERATE WITH THE BRETHREN IN JUDEA?

1. The need was made known by Agabas.
2. Every man, according to his ability," participated in this effort.
3. Paul and Barnabas were chosen to deliver the money.
4. The money was delivered to the elders that were among the brethren of Judea (**vs. 29-30**).
 - a. Since every church was to have elders (**Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5**),
 - b. And Judea had several churches (**1 Thess. 2:14; Gal. 1:22**),
 - c. We conclude that the funds were delivered by the messenger into the hands of the elders of every church where there was a need and they distributed them.

D. AN EFFORT IS OFTEN MADE TO PROVE THAT MONEY WAS SENT BY THE CHURCH IN ANTIOCH TO THE ELDERS OF THE JERUSALEM CHURCH ONLY, AND THAT DISTRIBUTION WAS MADE THROUGH THEM AS A "SPONSORING" CHURCH.

1. This can only be done if we are certain that **ONLY** Jerusalem had elders. The text does not say "the Jerusalem elders," it says "the elders."
2. God's order is that **EACH** church have its own elders (**Acts 14:23**).
3. Is it reasonable to argue that the churches established so early and so close to the beginning did not have elders?
4. If they did not, the proof is still absent.

II. THE JERUSALEM RELIEF **57 A. D.** (**Rom. 15:25-28; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8 ñ 9**).

A. THE CIRCUMSTANCE OF THIS NEED WAS UNKNOWN.

1. May have arisen over persecution of the saints.
2. May have been because of economic conditions that effected Jerusalem, but didn't effect places of any distance.
3. May have just been a condition of the church because of its bulk, demographics, or any number of factors. **We don't know.**

B. PAUL'S ENCOURAGEMENT ñ NOT A COMMAND.

1. Based on equality (**Rom. 15:27**). Where did the gospel preaching begin?
2. Each congregation made its own determination (**Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:3-5**).
3. The need had been known for over a year (**2 Cor. 8:6-10**).

4. Each church raised its own money with a collection on the first day of the week (**1 Cor. 16:1-2**).

5. Paul never went to Rome to "pick up" the money. His first trip there was in his chain. Though he had been in the other places mentioned, and perhaps had been there when the money was collected, those churches sent their own men with the money they had collected (**2 Cor. 8:16-24**). Though Paul accompanied them, he did not touch the money (**vs. 19-21**). Corinth was encouraged to choose their own messengers as well (**1 Cor. 16:3-4**).

6. It is important to note how all this was done. Paul informed the brethren of the need in Jerusalem, and then he encouraged them to make a contribution of relief. They were to collect money on the 1st day of the week so that there would be no scrambling about at the last minute, or appearance of force on Paul's part. The money would be sent to Jerusalem in the hands of the men that each church chose to carry its own bounty, and Paul would go with them if it was meet.

C. SOME HAVE ARGUED THAT PAUL AND HIS GROUP CONSTITUTED A BENEVOLENCE INSTITUTION THROUGH WHICH THE CHURCHES ACTED.

1. Where is the evidence of their incorporation, or of anything being instituted?
2. Paul took himself out of the picture, except as a possible traveling companion.

D. SOME ARGUE THAT THE ANTIOCH CHURCH WAS A SPONSORING CHURCH BECAUSE THAT IS WHERE PAUL WAS FROM.

1. Where is the evidence that Antioch saw any of this money?
2. That confuses Paul's 1st journey with the others which were not from Antioch.

E. THERE IS OFTEN AN ATTEMPT TO CONFUSE THIS EVENT WITH THE ONE RECORDED IN **Acts 11**.

1. They were at least 10 years apart.
2. They are not the same at all.

F. SOME CONTEND THAT MONEY WAS GIVEN TO THE JERUSALEM ELDERS FOR DISTRIBUTION AMONG THE OTHER CHURCHES.

BOOK, CHAPTER, AND VERSE?

G. IN BOTH OF THESE EXAMPLES, CHURCHES TOOK UP COLLECTIONS, CHOSE THEIR OWN MESSENGERS, AND SENT DIRECTLY TO THE NEED.

NOTE: These two examples are the only ones we have where a church sent money to another church. Certain conclusions are necessary and natural. First, it would be wrong to send money from one treasury to another except in the case of a benevolent need among the member saints of the receiving church. Second, the money sent goes directly to the need, not through a society, corporation, institution or even a sponsoring church.

III. PAUL'S SUPPORT ñ HOW CHURCHES COOPERATE IN THE SUPPORT OF EVANGELISTS.

A. PAUL ARGUES FOR SUPPORTING THOSE WHO PREACH (**1 Cor. 9:1-15**).

B. HE RECEIVED SUPPORT FROM PHILIPPI (**Phil. 1:3-5; Phil. 4:10-18**).

C. PHILIPPI SENT MONEY BY MEANS OF THEIR OWN MESSENGER ñ EPAPHRODITUS (**Phil. 2:25**).

D. WHILE AT CORINTH, THE MONEY CAME DIRECTLY TO PAUL FROM THE SUPPORTING CHURCH (**2 Cor. 11:8-9**). IT DID NOT COME TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH, THEN TO PAUL.

1. Paul "took wages" of other churches.
2. He took none from the Corinthians (**1 Cor. 9:12**).

E. THE PATTERN IS THAT WE SUPPORT PREACHERS, NOT OTHER CONGREGATIONS, IN THEIR WORK. MONEY FOR SUPPORT CAN ONLY GO TO THE EVANGELIST, NOT THE CHURCH WHERE HE LABORS. OTHER CHURCHES MAY "COOPERATE" WITH US BY SUPPORTING THE SAME MAN, BUT INDEPENDENTLY AND CONCURRENTLY, **NOT JOINTLY**.

IV. ARE "SPONSORING CHURCHES" SCRIPTURAL?

A. **WHAT IS** A "SPONSORING CHURCH?"

1. It is where churches combine their funds and centralize the control over the use of those funds in one congregation and under one eldership as a means of accomplishing their work. That one congregation is called the "sponsoring church."
2. Sometimes, one congregation will determine to do a particular work and will solicit funds from other churches to aid in the financing of that work.
3. Sometimes congregations will get together mutually to start such a work..
4. In each case, the sponsoring church oversees and does the work, while other churches contribute to it.
5. The sponsoring church controls a portion of the contributing church work and money in such an arrangement.

B. **WHO OPERATES** THROUGH A "SPONSORING CHURCH ARRANGEMENT?"

1. Sunnydale, Potters, Boles orphan asylums.
2. Various and sundry Old Folks Homes.
3. Herald of Truth Radio and Television programs, World Bible School.
4. Sunset School of Preaching.

C. **WHAT IS WRONG** WITH THE "SPONSORING CHURCH ARRANGEMENT?"

1. **2 John 9; Gal. 1:6-9**. Where is the **authority** for sponsoring churches?
2. It violates the limits imposed by the specifically designated jurisdiction of elders.

a. Elders to be appointed in every church (**Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5**).

b. Jurisdiction of elders Specified:

- **Acts 20:28**, Where the Holy Spirit made them bishops.

- **1 Pet. 5:1-2**, Which is among them.

- Jurisdiction strictly limited to the congregation where they are appointed.

c. If our money is sent to a sponsoring church so they can do our work, who is exercising the oversight in regard to our money and work? Whose work is it? Whose money is it?

d. Can the elders of one church oversee a portion of the work and money of another?

e. If so, why not all their money and work? Why not their teaching program? Worship? Discipline?

D. DANGERS OF THE "SPONSORING CHURCH ARRANGEMENT."

1. If the Herald of Truth begins to teach false doctrine, who is effected?

a. Listeners, most obviously.

b. Contributing churches.

c. Churches over whom they exercise influence.

2. If Baseline begins to teach error concerning the Holy Spirit, who is effected?

a. Other churches who are influenced by the larger "Sponsoring Church."

b. The children who are left to wonder at the battle for control of the home.

3. What if this is an unauthorized practice in the first place? (**Gal. 1:6-9; Col. 2:8**).

4. If Authority is not sought here, what makes us think that it will be sought elsewhere?

a. Instrumental music.

b. Fleshly inducements.

c. Speaking in tongues and healing services.

d. Lord's Supper on another day.

5. When an expedient divides the church into "Anti" and "Liberal" camps, is it still expedient? (**1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23; Gal. 5:13; 1 Cor. 4:6-7**).

CONCLUSION:

A. WE ARE BOUND TO THE PATTERN GOD HAS GIVEN (**2 Tim. 1:13; Heb. 8:5; 1 Cor. 3:10**)

B. TO FORSAKE THE PATTERN IS TO FORSAKE GOD AND BE LOST (**2 John 9**).

C. WE WILL NOT PRACTICE THESE THINGS HERE.