

Church Cooperation

Introduction

1. Able and sincere brethren in Christ differ on the work the churches should do, and on how they should do it.
2. Some say that it is right for churches to do every kind of work that is right for Christians to do.
 - A. Others say that individual Christians may do certain kinds of work which the churches have no scriptural right to undertake.
3. It is admitted generally that preaching and teaching the word to the whole world and ministering in the material needs of life's unfortunates are duties assigned by the Lord to the church.
 - A. How then, did the churches cooperate in these two classes of work, when under the direction of inspired men?

Teaching God's Word Is a Work of the Church

1. The church is said to be "the pillar and ground of the truth"
1 Timothy 3:15
 - A. The inspired apostle Paul wrote:
Ephesians 3:8-11
 - B. The church of the Thessalonians with apostolic approval "sounded forth the word of the Lord" (**1 Thessalonians 1:8**).

2. The church at Philippi preached the gospel in Thessalonica and increased fruit to their own account by sending contributions directly to Paul while he actually did the work.

Philippians 4:15-17

- A. These contributions were for Paul to preach the gospel, not for Paul's tent making business.

- 1) Making tents for profit, though a "good work" for Christians like Paul, Aquila and Priscilla, is not a "good work" for the church to do.

- B. Churches cooperated in preaching the gospel in distant places.

- 1) While Paul preached in Corinth, "other churches" cooperated with one another and with Paul by sending wages to him.

2 Corinthians 11:8

3. Bible church cooperation comes down to this:

- A. We see through the scriptures that **each individual congregation** (local church) sent funds for the purpose of evangelism or benevolence **directly to the individual or to the church that had need.**

- 1) As we discussed in our last lesson, the individual supported had to be a saint.
- a) Paul as a preacher could receive funds directly from a cooperating church (local church)
- b) An individual saint in need could receive benevolent help from a cooperating church (local church).

Ways in Which New Testament Churches Did Not Cooperate in the Work of Preaching the Gospel

1. Do you read anywhere in the Bible where one church (local church) appointed itself or received an anointment from any other church or individual to be **“the sponsoring church?”**
 - A. Were there sponsoring churches that announced “send us your money. We will select the messengers and preachers and missionaries and all workers for this preaching program.”
 - 1) We will fix their wages and decide where they will go.
 - a) Have “fellowship with us in our good work!”
 - b) What does this mean? “Send us your money?”
 1. Do you think they want “fellowship” in the oversight and control of the program?
 2. “Send us the money and we will do the rest!”
2. This kind of cooperation is being advocated and practiced today by the “sponsoring church” promoters in churches of Christ across the country.
 - A. Why is this kind of cooperation wrong?
 - 1) It destroys the autonomy, independence, and self-respect of the cooperating churches — and of course there is — **NO Bible Authority.**
3. The New Testament church cooperated in the work of preaching the gospel - this is a fact.
 - A. There is nowhere that one can go to find that they cooperated after the pattern of a society or sponsoring church.

Churches Cooperated in Benevolent Work

1. **As we discussed in our last lesson, churches cooperated by sending contributions to the churches in Judea for the relief of poor saints.** (Acts 11:27-30; 12:25; Romans 15:25-26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:1-4; 9:1-15; Acts 24:17)
2. **They also cooperated in the appointment of messengers to travel among the churches and to teach other churches to give for the relief of the poor saints.**
2 Corinthians 8:18-24
3. **They also cooperated in the use of the same agents to transport funds to the churches in the disaster area.** (Acts 11:29-30; 12:25; 2 Corinthians 8:20-21; Acts 24:17).
 - A. **These are Bible facts! This is the truth because we can show Bible authority, proof text that this was done and is therefore authorized today.**

Ways Churches

Did Not Cooperate in Supplying the Needs to the Poor Saint

1. **They did not send funds to any church where the saints in the receiving church were in no greater need.**
2. **When the famine or need was over, then there was no longer a need to continue to support them. Only done during the time of need.**
3. **When famine strikes upon a church anywhere, then churches everywhere should cooperate by sending contributions by whatever means available and honorable.**

2 Corinthians 8:21 providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.

4. Cecil B. Douthitt, a gospel preacher that passed away in 1971 wrote the following concerning this subject:

If some church, for example, the church in Ephesus, had begun to reason with apostolic approval after this fashion: "Widows, orphans and old people always will need help. Famine, pestilence and earthquakes are sure to strike somewhere sometime. We are strategically located between the East and West, and our elders are men of vision, integrity and ability. Let us put on a brotherhood campaign of collecting funds for charity from churches all over the world. Then let us gather orphans or widows or old people from any place we choose, bring them here in places we have provided, and we will take care of just as many as the funds from other churches and our business enterprises will support. This work will be under our oversight and control; then no man on earth could raise any scriptural objection to the principle of centralized oversight and control, which developed the Roman hierarchy. But is there any man on earth who sincerely thinks that the churches in the days of inspiration participated in that kind of cooperation?"

Conclusion

- 1. Let's make sure that all we do in the name of religion is based on Bible Authority.**
- 2. If people would remove the "I think's", "I Believe's", and return to "I will do the will of the Lord", then the church will function as it was designed and churches of Christ could be and would be united across the country!**
- 3. If we practice anything without Bible Authority we are sinning.**

Matthew 15:9 And in vain they worship Me, **teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.**

Jeremiah 10:23 O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; **it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.**

4. I hope that everyone of us can learn something else from these lessons on liberalism in the church today.

A. That is, that the true child of God will search the scriptures to find out what things are approved of by God. Paul wrote:

2 Timothy 3:1-5 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, **having a form of godliness but denying its power.** And **from such people turn away!**

B. John wrote:

2 John 9-11 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. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; **for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.**

C. We must see that when we fellowship error, we are partakers of that error!

- 1) That is why it is so important to make sure that we strive to worship with saints that are striving to “Hold fast the pattern of sound words” (2 Timothy 1:13).**
 - a) When away on a trip or vacation, which church do we seek to worship with?**