

CO-OPERATION BETWEEN CHURCHES

INTRODUCTION

A. **Revelation 2:1-5** *"To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 'I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place — unless you repent.'"*

Jesus pays attention to what each church is doing. These congregations were told to repent. Let's not be a church that needs to repent, but if we are, let's be willing to do so!

B. **Acts 20:28** *"The church of God which He purchased with His own blood."*
The church is precious to the Lord and that it belongs to Him, not us.

I. A CHURCH MAY SEND GREETINGS TO ANOTHER CHURCH.

A. **Romans 16:16** *"Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you."*
Paul relayed greetings to the church at Rome from multiple other churches of Christ. Each congregation is not meant to be so autonomous that it neglects to acknowledge other congregations.

B. **1st Corinthians 16:19** *"The churches of Asia greet you."*
The apostle sent greetings to the church at Corinth from the several churches in Asia. More churches today need to take up this practice.

II. A CHURCH MAY SEND LETTERS OF REFERENCE TO ANOTHER CHURCH.

A. **Acts 18:27** *"When he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace."*

When Apollos left Ephesus for Achaia, the brethren in one locale wrote the brethren at his destination, exhorting them to receive him. Too few churches are following this example today.

B. **Romans 16:1-2** *"I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also."*

When Phoebe left the church at Cenchrea for the one in Rome, Paul commended her to them. Letters of reference provide the receiving church with useful information about newcomers.

C. **2nd John 10-11** *"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."*

Brethren must exercise caution as to whom they receive. Letters of reference merely facilitate this.

III. A CHURCH MAY SEND SCRIPTURE TO ANOTHER CHURCH.

A. **Colossians 4:16** *"Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea."*

The apostle gave the church in Colossae specific instructions to relay his epistle to them to the church at Laodicea. Likewise, the church at Laodicea was to get their epistle from Paul into the hands of the church in Colossae.

B. **Revelation 1:11** *"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,' and, 'What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in*

Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."

A single book contained letters for seven churches. This very fact necessarily implies that the churches were to circulate the material.

C. **Galatians 1:1-2** *"Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead), and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia."*

That another letter was intended for multiple churches indicates distribution was necessary and expected.

D. **Ephesians 3:4** *"When you read, you may understand."*

Since there can be no understanding without reading, Scripture must be circulated widely, and the churches were clearly responsible for the initial circulation of the New Testament. It is, therefore, right for Bibles to be sent from one church to another.

IV. A CHURCH MAY SEND RELIEF FOR NEEDY SAINTS TO ANOTHER CHURCH.

A. **Acts 11:27-30** *"Prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. 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. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul."*

When the church at Antioch learned of a coming famine, they determined to send relief to their brethren in Judea. That it was received by elders shows this was not merely a transference from some Christians to other Christians, but from a church to another church.

B. **1st Corinthians 16:1-4** *"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may*

prosper, that there be no collections when I come. And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me."

The collections of the church in Corinth and the churches of Galatia were intended as a gift for Jerusalem to be delivered by designated messengers.

C. **2nd Corinthians 8:1-9:15** "Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God. So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. But as you abound in everything — in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us — see that you abound in this grace also. I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have. For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack — that there may be equality. As it is written, 'He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack.' But thanks be to God who puts the

same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus. For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord. And we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches, and not only that, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord Himself and to show your ready mind, avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us — providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. And we have sent with them our brother whom we have often proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, because of the great confidence which we have in you. If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you. Or if our brethren are inquired about, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. Therefore show to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf. Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority. Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready; lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting. Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation. But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: 'He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the

poor; His righteousness endures forever.' Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men, and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"

The needs of the saints were addressed by the churches of Macedonia and Achaia, their gifts being sent by the hands of Titus and other designated messengers.

V. A CHURCH MAY SEND A PREACHER TO ANOTHER CHURCH.

A. Acts 11:19-26 *"Those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."*

After souls had already been won in Antioch, meaning a church was established there, the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch to preach.

B. *Acts 15:22-35* “*Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. They wrote this, letter by them:*

The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, to the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "You must be circumcised and keep the law" — to whom we gave no such commandment — it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.

So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement. Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words. And after they had stayed there for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles. However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there. Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.”

To resolve a controversy that had involved members from Jerusalem unsettling the church in Antioch, the church in Jerusalem sought to clarify the issue by sending Judas and Silas to exhort them.

C. **Acts 15:40-41** “Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.”

Paul and Silas were sent by the church at Antioch to the churches of Syria and Cilicia.

VI. A CHURCH MAY SEND WAGES TO A PREACHER.

A. **2nd Corinthians 11:8-9** “I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself.”

Ideally, a church will supply the needs of its own preacher, but a preacher may receive wages from other churches. In such cases, the recipient is the individual preacher, not the church he works with.

B. **Philippians 4:15-16** “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. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.”

While preaching elsewhere, Paul received aid from the church of Philippi.

C. **1st Corinthians 9:14** “The Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.”

Preachers deserve to earn a living when they are devoted to preaching the gospel.

VII. A CHURCH MAY NOT SEND THROUGH A SPONSORING CHURCH TO OTHER CHURCHES.

A. **Proverbs 30:6** “Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.”

If God's word is truth ([John 1:1](#)), then anything more is a lie. There are many approved instances of cooperation between churches of Christ, but never do we read of authorization for churches to funnel their assistance for one church through a single sponsoring church.

B. [2nd John 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."*

Because going beyond Christ's doctrine leaves one godless, we must never exceed the limits of church co-operation as revealed in the New Testament.

VIII. A CHURCH MAY NOT OVERSEE ANOTHER CHURCH.

A. [1st Peter 5:1-2](#) *"The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is **among you**, serving as overseers."*

Elders are to oversee the flock "among" them. For a church's elders to oversee other churches is a flagrant violation of their duties.

B. [Acts 14:23](#) *"They had appointed elders in every church."*
[Titus 1:5](#) *"Set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city."*

Either a church has elders or it lacks; never is a church to seek oversight from outside.

CONCLUSION

A. [Ephesians 3:10-11](#) *"The manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

The church was always part of God's eternal plan. Nothing about it was an afterthought. No needs were overlooked. Therefore, what is written of the church in the New Testament is complete, in no wise needing improvement.

B. **Colossians 1:15-18** *"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence."*

Jesus, in His preeminence, is Head of the body, which is His church. Let Him rule. He doesn't need us to change His church for Him.