

THE SOUTHEAST SOWER

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LET NOT THE CHURCH BE BURDENED

CURTIS BYERS

“Really? Those are the only times?”

This might be a reasonable reaction from one who first hears that there are only three times in the New Testament where Christians collectively gave as a church to supply others’ need (cf. Acts 2:6; Acts 11:27-30; Acts 24:17; 1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Romans 15:25-27).

Given the multiplicity of large church programs today focused on humanity’s needs, most people would expect the New Testament to be filled with such examples. Adding to their surprise is that only Christians in need were assisted; there is simply no New Testament record of Christians collectively giving to unbelievers in need, or of commands that they do so.

In line with this modern way of thinking, when Jesus

teaches that we are to “love our neighbor as our self,” most conclude that Jesus is giving the *church* its mission to care for the needs of the world, coining the phrase, “whatever a Christian can do, the church can do.” Of course, they do not really mean it. Would they have a local church give money to the *National Rifle Association*, *Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)*, or the *Red Hat Society*? Everyone draws a line somewhere between what is acceptable and what is not. But, even if we restrict ourselves to the question of helping the poor, is it really true that “whatever a Christian can do, the church can do?” Or, is it at least possible that Jesus intended for Christians to impact the world through their *individual* service? And how are we to know our Lord’s intention?

Paul’s instructions to Timothy (1 Timothy 5) point us to the Lord’s answer. Paul’s basic directive is for families to take care of their own extended families so that “the church be not burdened” (v. 16). That is the rule. The only exception Paul permits is in the case of certain *qualified* widows where the church has the responsibility to provide permanent support. The qualifications for these widows are rather strict: she must be at least 60 years old, having been the wife of one man, and “having a reputation for good works” (v. 10). Paul is clear that these widows alone are to be the responsibility of the church: the church is to “refuse” permanent care for any other widow (v. 11). Read his full argument. He does not take this stance because the church did not have the funds to take care of others,

The Southeast Church of Christ meets at:

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44260*

Phone:

330.628.7432

SERVICES:

Sunday

Bible Study:

10:00 am

Worship:

10:50 am

6:00 pm

Wednesday

Bible Study:

7:30 pm”

nor does it seem that the church was unwilling to provide assistance. And he certainly does not argue that these other widows do not have legitimate challenges in providing for themselves. Rather, Paul is concerned about the adverse impact of the church permanently helping those who have the ability to provide for themselves or who has family who can give the needed assistance.

If we take Paul's instructions seriously, how can we possibly justify the church collecting funds to provide the needs for any other group of people, whether it is educational or recreational activities for the young, family services of all sorts for those either inside or outside the church, or even the provision of basic needs for those outside the church? More pointedly, if the church is not to take care of the long-term needs of a 58 year old widow, do you think Paul would approve of a church providing a gym for the year-round recreational needs of her grandchildren?

The seeming harshness of these instructions must be tempered with the knowledge that Christians are to be charitable and kind toward all they personally encounter (Galatians 6:10). It may seem mysterious why God uses Christians acting on their own to be a blessing to all the world when we are convinced that Christians acting collective-

ly as the church could do so much more. But do we really believe that to be true? What makes us think that elders or deacons are more informed about the needs of the world than Christians over whom they have charge? Christians in their everyday walk of life see a wide variety of needs, and when each Christian in a congregation responds to those needs as they have the ability, will not the collective result be optimum?

Yet, the tremendous power of Christians acting individually will only be realized if Christians do in fact heed their Lord's call to "love our neighbor as our self." That is the lesson elders need to teach by word and example instead of making grand plans to take on responsibilities for the church that the Lord never directed.

THE GOSPEL at PHILIPPI

Leon Mauldin

"... There is a lot of history surrounding the biblical city of Philippi, a city in NT times in eastern Macedonia (modern northern Greece). Philippi was situated about 10 miles inland from the Aegean Sea (accessed through the local port of Neapolis, modern Kavala), on a plain surrounded by mountains on three sides.

Philippi was known for its rich gold mines as well as for its numerous springs of water that rise in its hills. This community was founded by settlers from Thrace and was initially named Crenides/Krenides because of its springs (Greek krenai). The site was later named Philippi in hon-

or of Philip II of Macedon (father of Alexander the Great). Philip enlarged the city and built a wall around it, remnants of which remain. Philippi was subsequently conquered by the Romans (168-167 BC).

Work on the famous highway known as the Via Egnatia began ca. 145 BC and was completed ca. 130. This Roman road connected Byzantium with the Adriatic ports that gave access to Italy. The Via Egnatia became Rome's primary stopping point along the way. Rome's primary purpose in building this artery was to make it possible to move its troops rapidly throughout the empire as needed. Paul made use of it on his 2nd Missionary Journey as he travelled from there through Amphipolis and Apollonia on to Thessalonica (Acts 16:11-12; 17:1). I am persuaded that such facts illustrate the biblical concept of the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4, 5). When Jesus accomplished His great redemptive work, and then commissioned the apostles to go tell the good news, all things were ready, including a system of roads and bridges the world had never previously seen."

"... The congregation formed here as a result of the conversion of Lydia, the jailor, their households as well as others (Acts 16), would be a great source of joy to Paul as reflected in the short epistle known as Philippians.

Remember those of the congregation who are shut-in and have been struggling with serious health issues with a call, card, visit, and your prayers.