

Work of the Church

By Mark Mayberry
12/21/2008

Introduction

The church of our Lord is a divine institution with a divine mission. It has been given a great and glorious work to accomplish. The church is a demonstration of God's wisdom and purpose (Eph. 3:8-12). In modern conception, the church is an amalgamated social club/welfare agency. However, in God's design, the church is a *spiritual* institution which ministers primarily to man's *spiritual* needs (1 Pet. 2:4-10).

Ephesians 3:8-12 ... 8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; 10 so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him. (NASB95)

1 Peter 2:4-10 ... 4 And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For this is contained in Scripture: "Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed." 7 This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "The stone which the builders rejected, This became the very corner stone," 8 and, "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. 9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (NASB95)

The church that belongs to Christ will conform to the divine pattern revealed in Scripture. Just as the Lord had a pattern for his tabernacle/temple, the focal point of Israel's worship during the Mosaic dispensation, he also has a pattern for his spiritual temple, the church, which is the focal point of acceptable worship today.

Down through the ages, men have sought to reshape the church to their liking. As Israel of old wanted a king to go before them, many today desire something more elaborate and ostentatious than simple New Testament Christianity. However, those who discount the divine pattern for the church disparage the God of heaven. Those who would reshape the church rob it of its power.

What is the work of the church? From a Scriptural standpoint, it has been assigned the duties of evangelism, edification, and benevolence. In these areas, the church of our Lord is all-sufficient and fully-equipped to do the work that God has given it to accomplish.

Universal vs. Local

Holy Scripture refers to the church in two distinct senses: universal and local. Viewed from a universal standpoint, the church has no organization, but is composed of all those down through the ages who have submitted to God's will. However, in a local sense, the church has a very distinct organization: each independent and autonomous congregation should have elders, deacons, an evangelist(s), and active members (Acts 14:23; 1 Cor. 1:1-2; Phil. 1:1-2). Though automatically added to the church universal (Acts 2:46-47), we must join ourselves to a local congregation (Acts 9:26-28).

Acts 14:23 ... 23 When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 1:1-2 ... 1 Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, 2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: (NASB95)

Philippians 1:1-2 ... 1 Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (NASB95)

Acts 2:46-47 ... 46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (NASB95)

Acts 9:26-28 ... 26 When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. 28 And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord. (NASB95)

To achieve their goals, men create bureaucratic, ecclesiastical hierarchies. Sadly, such thinking permeates the church today, with crippling and incapacitating effect.

The Random House Dictionary of the English Language defines "bureaucracy" as "excessive multiplication of, and concentration of power, in administrative bureaus or administrators." Political bureaucracies become bogged down in red tape and regulation. Religious bureaucracies inevitably lead to stagnation and decline. The key to church growth is personal involvement. Each local congregation must do the work God has given it to accomplish. When this pattern is

followed, successful results ensue. However, in both the secular and spiritual realms, men often shift responsibility from an individual/local level to a broader/collective level. This path inevitably leads to disappointing and diminished results.

Centralized control of the work of the church is objectionable for three reasons: First, it violates congregational autonomy; second, it is inefficient; and third, it opens the door to corruption from the top-down. In striking contrast, congregational action under the direction of local elders is preferable because it is in harmony with God's will, it is far more effective in its use of resources, and local autonomy serves as a barricade/firewall against the threat of apostasy.

Evangelism

Christ came into this world of sin in order to seek and save the lost (Matt. 18:11; Luke 19:10). Man cannot be saved apart from obeying the gospel (John 3:36; Heb. 5:8-9). The church has been assigned the task of holding forth the word of life to a lost and dying world. It is described as the "pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:14-15). In giving the Great Commission, Jesus enjoined evangelistic responsibility directly upon the apostles (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:44-49), and indirectly, upon all disciples (1 Thess. 1:6-8). This focus is clearly evident in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 5:42; 8:4; 8:12; 8:25; 8:35; 8:40; 10:42; 11:20; 13:32; 14:7; 14:15; 14:21; 15:35; 16:10; 17:18; 20:25; 28:31).

*Matthew 18:11 ... 11 [“For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.”]
(NASB95)*

*Luke 19:10 ... 10 “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”
(NASB95)*

John 3:36 ... 36 “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” (NASB95)

Hebrews 5:8-9 ... 8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. 9 And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, (NASB95)

1 Timothy 3:14-15 ... 14 I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; 15 but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. (NASB95)

Matthew 28:18-20 ... 18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (NASB95)

Mark 16:15-16 ... 15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. 16 "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. (NASB95)

Luke 24:44-49 ... 44 Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 "You are witnesses of these things. 49 "And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." (NASB95)

1 Thessalonians 1:6-8 ... 6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. (NASB95)

Acts 5:42 ... 42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. (NASB95)

Acts 8:4 ... 4 Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. (NASB95)

Acts 8:12 ... 12 But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. (NASB95)

Acts 8:25 ... 25 So, when they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans. (NASB95)

Acts 8:35 ... 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. (NASB95)

Acts 8:40 ... 40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea. (NASB95)

Acts 10:42 ... 42 "And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. (NASB95)

Acts 11:20 ... 20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. (NASB95)

Acts 13:32 ... 32 “And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, (NASB95)

Acts 14:7 ... 7 and there they continued to preach the gospel. (NASB95)

Acts 14:15 ... 15 and saying, “Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. (NASB95)

Acts 14:21 ... 21 After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, (NASB95)

Acts 15:35 ... 35 But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching with many others also, the word of the Lord. (NASB95)

Acts 16:10 ... 10 When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. (NASB95)

Acts 17:18 ... 18 And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, “What would this idle babbler wish to say?” Others, “He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. (NASB95)

Acts 20:25 ... 25 “And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. (NASB95)

Acts 28:31 ... 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered. (NASB95)

Since this is a divinely commissioned work, the church can use its resources to preach the gospel. In the First Corinthian letter, Paul defended the right of evangelists to be supported (1 Cor. 9:6-14). The Philippian church provided the apostle with financial support on repeated occasions (Phil. 1:3-5; 4:15-19). He also received wages from other churches during the time he preached at Corinth (2 Cor. 11:8).

1 Corinthians 9:6-14 ... 6 Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? 7 Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? 8 I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? 9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.” God is not concerned about oxen, is He? 10 Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. 11 If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? 12 If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. 13 Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food

*of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar?
14 So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the
gospel. (NASB95)*

*Philippians 1:3-5 ... 3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always offering
prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, 5 in view of your participation in the
gospel from the first day until now. (NASB95)*

*Philippians 4:15-19 ... 15 You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first
preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of
giving and receiving but you alone; 16 for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than
once for my needs. 17 Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which
increases to your account. 18 But I have received everything in full and have an
abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent,
a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. 19 And my God will
supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. (NASB95)*

*2 Corinthians 11:8 ... 8 I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you;
(NASB95)*

The church is fully equipped to accomplish its divinely ordained mission. Unfortunately, many lack faith in God's arrangement. Laying aside the divine pattern, they substitute their own methods of evangelism.

Missionary Societies have been popular with many religious denominations and even certain elements of the brotherhood in years gone by. Such organizations are separate and distinct from the church. They receive contributions from local congregations and in turn do evangelistic work for them. It is wrong for churches to contribute to another organization to perform the work God has assigned to it. Such abdication of responsibility suggests that men do not believe that the church can accomplish its task and is therefore unable to fulfill God's work. This attitude reflects upon the wisdom of God who has planned the church. Let us remember that during the first century, the gospel was preached to the whole world without the aid of a missionary society.

More recently, the "Sponsoring Church" arrangement has become a very popular method of evangelism among many churches of Christ. Individual churches send contributions to a church which is "sponsoring" a certain work, such as the support of foreign missions, radio and television programs, etc. The "sponsoring church" supervises the program and oversees the work. The "Herald of Truth" radio and television broadcasts and the "One Nation Under God" literature distribution campaign are examples of this practice. In principle, this arrangement is no different than the missionary society. No church has the right to turn any part (or all) of its evangelistic oversight to another church or set of elders. Every New Testament congregation was independent and autonomous (Acts 14:23; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). However, the sponsoring church arrangement destroys congregational autonomy. It also limits growth. Local churches stagnate when they depend on others to do their own work!

Acts 14:23 ... 23 When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (NASB95)

1 Peter 5:1-4 ... 1 Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; 3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (NASB95)

Another problem is also evident today. So many churches have become sidetracked. They have abdicated their God-given mission and have become little more than a social club. In promoting the social gospel, they have turned away from their main responsibility of soul-winning. Do we win people by ball games and ice-cream suppers or by teaching the Word (John 6:26-27, 44-45; 1 Pet. 1:23-25)? Those employing carnal appeals manifest a lack of faith in the message of truth. The gospel, not fun and frolic, is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16-17; 2 Thess. 2:13-15).

John 6:26-27 ... 26 Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. 27 "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal." (NASB95)

John 6:44-45 ... 44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. 45 "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught of God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. (NASB95)

1 Peter 1:23-25 ... 23 for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. 24 For, "All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, And the flower falls off, 25 But the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word which was preached to you. (NASB95)

Romans 1:16-17 ... 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith." (NASB95)

2 Thessalonians 2:13-15 ... 13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. 14 It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us. (NASB95)

Edification

The verb is used of Christ, in foreshadowing his physical death: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will **build**/raise it up” (Matt. 26:59-61; 27:39-40; Mark 14:55-59; 15:29-30; cf. John 2:19-22). The noun is used of Christ, in reference to his glorified position: “The stone which the **builders** rejected, this became the chief corner stone” (Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10-11; Luke 20:17-18; 1 Pet. 2:6-8). Exercising due care and caution, let us ensure that our upbuilding efforts are consistent with the will of God.

Both terms are frequently used in the teaching of Jesus, in reference to barns (Luke 12:18), houses (Matt. 7:24, 26; Luke 6:48, 49; 14:30), a synagogue (Luke 7:5), the Temple of Solomon (Acts 7:47, 49) and Herod’s Temple (Matt. 24:1; Mark 13:1, 2; John 2:20), tombs (Matt. 23:29; Luke 11:47, 48), towers (Matt. 21:33; Mark 12:1; Luke 14:28), the physical location of a city (Luke 4:29), and the earthly occupation of builders (Luke 17:28).

Both terms are used symbolically, of the former house of Judaism (Gal. 2:18), and the future home of heaven (2 Cor. 5:1). Both terms are used in reference to the church, our present spiritual habitation, built upon a solid and enduring foundation (Matt. 16:13-19; Eph. 2:19-22).

*Galatians 2:18 ... 18 “For if I ***rebuild** what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. (NASB95)*

*2 Corinthians 5:1 ... 1 For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a ***building** from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (NASB95)*

*Matthew 16:13-19 ... 13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” 14 And they said, “Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.” 15 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 17 And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 “I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will ***build** My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 19 “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” (NASB95)*

*Ephesians 2:19-22 ... 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole ***building**, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. (NASB95)*

Christians are built up through proper reliance upon the Word of God (Acts 9:26-31; 20:28-32). Christians are built up through the proper use of spiritual offices (Eph. 4:11-16). Christians are

built up through the proper exercise of spiritual authority (2 Cor. 10:7-11; 12:19; 13:10). Christians are built up through proper spiritual labors (Rom. 15:18-21; 1 Cor. 3:1-9).

*Acts 9:26-31 ... 26 When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. 28 And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord. 29 And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews; but they were attempting to put him to death. 30 But when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus. 31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being ***built** up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase. (NASB95)*

*Acts 20:28-32 ... 28 “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 “Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. 32 “And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to ***build** you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (NASB95)*

*Ephesians 4:11-16 ... 11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the ***building** up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the ***building** up of itself in love. (NASB95)*

*2 Corinthians 10:7-11 ... 7 You are looking at things as they are outwardly. If anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ’s, let him consider this again within himself, that just as he is Christ’s, so also are we. 8 For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for ***building** you up and not for destroying you, I will not be put to shame, 9 for I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters. 10 For they say, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible.” 11 Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when absent, such persons we are also in deed when present. (NASB95)*

2 Corinthians 12:19 ... 19 All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. Actually, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your ***upbuilding**, beloved. (NASB95)

2 Corinthians 13:10 ... 10 For this reason I am writing these things while absent, so that when present I need not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me for ***building** up and not for tearing down. (NASB95)

Romans 15:18-21 ... 18 For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, 19 in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. 20 And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not ***build** on another man's foundation; 21 but as it is written, "They who had no news of Him shall see, And they who have not heard shall understand." (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 3:1-9 ... 1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. 2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, 3 for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men? 5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's ***building**. (NASB95)

First Century Christians were built up through the proper exercise of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 14:1-5, 12-19, 26-33). Christians are built up through the considerate exercise of Christian liberty and respect for another's conscience (Rom. 14:19-21; 15:1-3; 1 Cor. 8:7-13; 10:23-30).

1 Corinthians 14:1-5 ... 1 Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. 2 For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries. 3 But one who prophesies speaks to men for ***edification** and exhortation and consolation. 4 One who speaks in a tongue ***edifies** himself; but one who prophesies ***edifies** the church. 5 Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive ***edifying**. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 14:12-19 ... 12 So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the ***edification** of the church. 13 Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. 15 What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also. 16 Otherwise if

*you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? 17 For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not ***edified**. 18 I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; 19 however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue. (NASB95)*

*1 Corinthians 14:26-33 ... 26 What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for ***edification**. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret; 28 but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. 30 But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; 32 and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; 33 for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. (NASB95)*

*Romans 14:19-21 ... 19 So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the ***building** up of one another. 20 Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. 21 It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. (NASB95)*

*Romans 15:1-3 ... 1 Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. 2 Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his ***edification**. 3 For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me." (NASB95)*

*1 Corinthians 8:7-13 ... 7 However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. 8 But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. 9 But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be ***strengthened** to eat things sacrificed to idols? 11 For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. 12 And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble. (NASB95)*

*1 Corinthians 10:23-24 ... 23 All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things ***edify**. 24 Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor. 25 Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience' sake; 26 for the earth is the Lord's, and all it contains. 27 If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience' sake. 28 But if anyone says to you, "This is meat*

sacrificed to idols,” do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience’ sake; 29 I mean not your own conscience, but the other man’s; for why is my freedom judged by another’s conscience? 30 If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks? (NASB95)

Christians are built up through the proper practice of *agape* love (1 Cor. 8:1-3; cf. 13:4-7). Christians are built up through proper spiritual association with one another (Eph. 4:29; 1 Thess. 5:11).

*1 Corinthians 8:1-3 ... 1 Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love ***edifies**. 2 If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; 3 but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him. (NASB95)*

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 ... 4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (NASB95)

*Ephesians 4:29 ... 29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for ***edification** according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. (NASB95)*

*1 Thessalonians 5:11 ... Therefore encourage one another and ***build** up one another, just as you also ...*

Edification carries the idea of spiritual instruction and education. In giving the Great Commission, Jesus told the disciples to “teach... baptize.. and teach the baptized” (Matt. 28:20). With the passing of time, we should grow and mature as Christians (2 Pet. 3:18). The church is to edify, or build up, its members. Periods of worship, active teaching and work programs, and even church discipline, all serve to edify.

Matthew 28:20 ... 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (NASB95)

2 Peter 3:18 ... 18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (NASB95)

Since this is a divinely commissioned work, the church can use its resources to provide for the spiritual growth of its members. A meeting place, class materials, song books, etc. are all justified on this basis. However, this does not authorize fellowship halls because recreational activities are not part of the work of the church. Parents, not the church, have the responsibility for providing recreation for their children (1 Cor. 11:22).

1 Corinthians 11:22 ... 22 What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you. (NASB95)

Let us recognize that the work of edification is to be done through the organization of the local congregation. Moreover, the New Testament church fulfilled its responsibility without depending upon human institutions such as “Christian Colleges.” Colleges can be useful from the standpoint of the home, but the church can accomplish its work on its own.

Benevolence

The Random House Dictionary of the English Language defines “benevolence” as “(1) desire to do good to others; goodwill; charitableness: to be filled with benevolence toward one’s fellow creatures; (2) an act of kindness; a charitable gift; (3) English History: a forced contribution to the sovereign.”

Individual Responsibility

Old Testament Emphasis (Deuteronomy 15:7-11; Job 31:16-22; etc.)

Deuteronomy 15:7-11 ... 7 “If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; 8 but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks. 9 “Beware that there is no base thought in your heart, saying, ‘The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,’ and your eye is hostile toward your poor brother, and you give him nothing; then he may cry to the Lord against you, and it will be a sin in you. 10 “You shall generously give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all your undertakings. 11 “For the poor will never cease to be in the land; therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.’ (NASB95)

Job 31:16-22 ... 16 “If I have kept the poor from their desire, Or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail, 17 Or have eaten my morsel alone, And the orphan has not shared it 18 (But from my youth he grew up with me as with a father, And from infancy I guided her), 19 If I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing, Or that the needy had no covering, 20 If his loins have not thanked me, And if he has not been warmed with the fleece of my sheep, 21 If I have lifted up my hand against the orphan, Because I saw I had support in the gate, 22 Let my shoulder fall from the socket, And my arm be broken off at the elbow. (NASB95)

New Testament Emphasis

There are 3 categories of benevolence dealt with in the New Testament: individual responsibility, congregational responsibility, and congregational cooperation in the area of benevolence.

The vast majority of New Testament passages that deal with benevolence have to do with individual responsibility (Matthew 6:1-4; 10:40-42; 19:16-22; 25:31-46; Luke 3:8-11; 6:38; 10:30-37; 12:13-21, 12:31-34; 14:12-14; 16:19-31; Acts 9:36-41; 10:1-4; 20:34-35; Romans

12:8, 13, 20; 1 Corinthians 13:3; Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 4:28; 1 Timothy 5:4, 8, 16a; 6:18; Hebrews 6:10; 13:2, 15-16; James 1:26-27; 2:15-16; 1 John 3:17-18).

Matthew 6:1-4 ... 1 “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. 2 “So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 3 “But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. (NASB95)

Matthew 10:40-42 ... 40 “He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. 41 “He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward. 42 “And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.” (NASB95)

Matthew 19:16-22 ... 16 And someone came to Him and said, “Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?” 17 And He said to him, “Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” 18 Then he said to Him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You shall not commit murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; 19 Honor your father and mother; and You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” 20 The young man said to Him, “All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?” 21 Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” 22 But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property. (NASB95)

Matthew 25:31-46 ... 31 “But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. 32 “All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; 33 and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. 34 “Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 ‘For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; 36 naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’ 37 “Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? 38 ‘And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39 ‘When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ 40 “The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’ 41 “Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; 42 for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; 43 I

was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.’ 44 “Then they themselves also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?’ 45 “Then He will answer them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ 46 “These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (NASB95)

Luke 3:8-11 ... 8 “Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father,’ for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. 9 “Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” 10 And the crowds were questioning him, saying, “Then what shall we do?” 11 And he would answer and say to them, “The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise.” (NASB95)

Luke 6:38 ... 38 “Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.” (NASB95)

Luke 10:30-37 ... 30 Jesus replied and said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. 31 “And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 “Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 “But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, 34 and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 “On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.’ 36 “Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers’ hands?” 37 And he said, “The one who showed mercy toward him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do the same.” (NASB95)

Luke 12:13-21 ... 13 Someone in the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” 14 But He said to him, “Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?” 15 Then He said to them, “Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.” 16 And He told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man was very productive. 17 “And he began reasoning to himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?’ 18 “Then he said, ‘This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 ‘And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.” ’ 20 “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?’ 21 “So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” (NASB95)

Luke 12:31-34 ... 31 "But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you. 32 "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. 33 "Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys. 34 "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (NASB95)

Luke 14:12-14 ... 12 And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. 13 "But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." (NASB95)

Luke 16:19-31 ... 19 "Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. 20 "And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, 21 and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. 22 "Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. 23 "In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 "And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' 25 "But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. 26 'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.' 27 "And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house— 28 for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' 29 "But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' 30 "But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' 31 "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.' " (NASB95)

Acts 9:36-41 ... 36 Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called Dorcas); **this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness [alms, KJV] and charity which she continually did.** 37 And it happened at that time that she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upper room. 38 Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him, imploring him, "Do not delay in coming to us." 39 So Peter arose and went with them. When he arrived, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them. 40 But Peter sent them all out and knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body, he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. 41 And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. (NASB95)

*Acts 10:1-4 ... 1 Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, 2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and **gave many alms to the Jewish people** and prayed to God continually. 3 About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, "Cornelius!" 4 And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and **alms** have ascended as a memorial before God. (NASB95)*

Acts 20:34-35 ... 34 "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. 35 "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' " (NASB95)

Romans 12:8 ... 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. (NASB95)

Romans 12:13 ... 13 contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. (NASB95)

Romans 12:20 ... 20 "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 13:3 ... 3 And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. (NASB95)

Galatians 6:10 ... 10 So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. (NASB95)

Ephesians 4:28 ... 28 He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. (NASB95)

1 Timothy 5:4 ... 4 but if any widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. (NASB95)

1 Timothy 5:8 ... 8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (NASB95)

1 Timothy 5:16 ... 16 If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed. (NASB95)

1 Timothy 6:18 ... 18 Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, (NASB95)

Hebrews 6:10 ... 10 For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. (NASB95)

Hebrews 13:2 ... 2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. (NASB95)

Hebrews 13:15-16 ... 15 Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. 16 And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. (NASB95)

James 1:26-27 ... 26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. 27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world. (NASB95)

James 2:15-16 ... 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? (NASB95)

1 John 3:17-18 ... 17 But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. (NASB95)

Congregational Responsibility

The local church must care for its own needy members (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37; 6:1-3; 1 Timothy 5:3-16). It is important to recognize that the Lord has limited the benevolent work that the church does from its treasury. Every case of collective benevolent work in the New Testament was made to needy "saints" (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; 6:1; 11:29; Romans 15:26; 15:31; 1 Corinthians 16:1; 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:1; 9:12; 1 Timothy 5:16). There is no command, example or inference that authorizes the church to engage in the work of general benevolence. Such assumptiveness would overly burden the church. Therefore, we should let the church do the work that God has assigned it to perform.

Acts 2:42-47 ... 42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. 44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; 45 and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. 46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (NASB95)

Acts 4:32-37 ... 32 And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all

things were common property to them. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. 34 For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales 35 and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need. 36 Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), 37 and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. (NASB95)

Acts 6:1-3 ... 1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. 2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. 3 "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. (NASB95)

1 Timothy 5:3-16 ... 3 Honor widows who are widows indeed; 4 but if any widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. 5 Now she who is a widow indeed and who has been left alone, has fixed her hope on God and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day. 6 But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives. 7 Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach. 8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 9 A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man, 10 having a reputation for good works; and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, and if she has devoted herself to every good work. 11 But refuse to put younger widows on the list, for when they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ, they want to get married, 12 thus incurring condemnation, because they have set aside their previous pledge. 13 At the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention. 14 Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach; 15 for some have already turned aside to follow Satan. 16 If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed. (NASB95)

"... all those who had believed were together and had all things in common..." (Acts 2:44-45).

"...the congregation of those who believed... there was not a needy person among them..." (Acts 4:32-35).

“...the disciples... their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food...”
(Acts 6:1).

“...the disciples... determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea” (Acts 11:29).

“...a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem...” (Romans 15:26).

“...that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints” (Romans 15:31).

“...the collection for the saints...” (1 Corinthians 16:1).

“...the support of the saints...” (2 Corinthians 8:4).

“...this ministry to the saints...” (2 Corinthians 9:1).

“...the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints...” (2 Corinthians 9:12).

“...the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed...” (1 Timothy 5:16). [See also 1 Timothy 5:5, 9-10 for qualifications of a widow indeed.]

Church Cooperation In Benevolence

Finally we read of situations where local churches helped other local churches. Sometimes unforeseen situations arise and a church becomes unable to supply its need. When this happened in the first century, sister churches helped the congregation(s) in need by sending relief.

During the reign of Claudius, when a famine struck the brethren in Judea, the disciples at Antioch sent a contribution for their relief, sending it by the hands of Saul and Barnabas to the local elders took care of the distribution of these funds (Acts 11:27-30).

Acts 11:27-30 ... 27 Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius. 29 And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. 30 And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders. (NASB95)

Almost a decade later, the churches of Macedonia and Achaia sent a contribution unto the poor saints at Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-31; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9). This relief was sent directly to the church in need with each congregation selecting its own messenger to carry its gift. Notice that this was concurrent action. No church lost its autonomy when participating in this form of cooperation.

Romans 15:25-31 ... 25 but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the

saints in Jerusalem. 27 Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things. 28 Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain. 29 I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. 30 Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, 31 that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints; (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 16:1-4 ... 1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. 2 On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come. 3 When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem; 4 and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me. (NASB95)

If the church can only provide for needy saints, what about the other needy people? Apparently some feel that the only way benevolent needs may be supplied is from the church treasury, but such is not true. Remember that the overwhelming emphasis in the New Testament is own individual responsibility (Galatians 6:10; James 1:27; etc.). God has provided that the family should care for its own (1 Timothy 5:4, 8, 16). He has ordained civil powers or governments to minister for good to its subjects (Romans 13:1-7; cf. Psalm 82:1-4; Isaiah 1:23; 3:14-15 10:1-2; Ezekiel 22:6-7).

Galatians 6:10 ... 10 So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. (NASB95)

James 1:27 ... 27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world. (NASB95)

1 Timothy 5:4 ... 4 but if any widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. (NASB95)

1 Timothy 5:8 ... 8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (NASB95)

1 Timothy 5:16 ... 16 If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed. (NASB95)

Romans 13:1-7 ... 1 Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a minister of God to you for

good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. 5 Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. (NASB95)

Psalm 82:1-4 ... 1 God takes His stand in His own congregation; He judges in the midst of the rulers. 2 How long will you judge unjustly And show partiality to the wicked? Selah. 3 Vindicate the weak and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and destitute. 4 Rescue the weak and needy; Deliver them out of the hand of the wicked. (NASB95)

Isaiah 1:23 ... 23 Your rulers are rebels And companions of thieves; Everyone loves a bribe And chases after rewards. They do not defend the orphan, Nor does the widow's plea come before them. (NASB95)

Isaiah 3:14-15 ... 14 The Lord enters into judgment with the elders and princes of His people, "It is you who have devoured the vineyard; The plunder of the poor is in your houses. 15 "What do you mean by crushing My people And grinding the face of the poor?" Declares the Lord God of hosts. (NASB95)

Isaiah 10:1-2 ... 1 Woe to those who enact evil statutes And to those who constantly record unjust decisions, 2 So as to deprive the needy of justice And rob the poor of My people of their rights, So that widows may be their spoil And that they may plunder the orphans. (NASB95)

Ezekiel 22:6-7 ... 6 "Behold, the rulers of Israel, each according to his power, have been in you for the purpose of shedding blood. 7 "They have treated father and mother lightly within you. The alien they have oppressed in your midst; the fatherless and the widow they have wronged in you. (NASB95)

Through what organization shall benevolent assistance be provided? Some have insisted upon church contributions to human organizations to supply the needs of the poor. However, the New Testament church did not rely upon such man-made organizations to perform its work. All the work God assigned to the church can be done through the local congregation. We do not have the right to change God's pattern and put our church work under some board of directors. Feeling the strength of this argument, some brethren have argued that the homes for orphans and the aged should be placed under a particular set of elders, and other churches should contribute to them. The problem with that plan is that it results in an unscriptural "sponsoring church" arrangement.

New Testament benevolence was very simple in concept. Benevolent work was done within the framework of the local congregation. Each church should provide for its own saints and there should be no organizations requiring unscriptural supervision.

Conclusion

What work has it been given to accomplish? How can the church use its resources? The church can use its resources to accomplish the work God has given it. That work is evangelism, edification and benevolence. The church will grow if we follow God's pattern. We must respect the authority of God's word (Col. 3:17). Therefore, let us follow the divine pattern as it relates to all aspects of the Lord's church (1 Pet. 4:11).

Colossians 3:17 ... 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (NASB95)

1 Peter 4:11 ... 11 Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (NASB95)

Sources: Weldon Warnock, "The Work of the Church," *Searching the Scriptures*, August 1978, p. 162; Luther Blackmon, "The New Testament Church: Its Mission," *The New Testament Church: A Truth Booklet*, p. 13; Weldon Warnock, "The Work of the Church," *Speech at the Dallas Preacher's Meeting*, July 13, 1990; Ferrell Jenkins, "Individual vs Congregational Action," *Speech at the Dallas Preacher's Meeting*, July 13, 1990; etc.