

Benevolence

Introduction

1. There is no better way to teach the plan of salvation than examining the cases of conversion in the book of Acts.
 - A. Examples such as: the Jews on Pentecost, the Samaritans, the Ethiopian eunuch, Saul, Cornelius, Lydia, the Philippian jailer, the Corinthians clearly reveal what one must do to be saved.
2. Similarly, the New Testament cases of local churches engaged in the work of Benevolence show us **who did the relieving and who were relieved**.
3. Before we begin our study this morning, let's first define a few words:
 - A. **Benevolence:** "an inclination to do good; charitable."
 - B. **Alien:** "a foreigner; One not born of the water and spirit and therefore is not a child of God."
 - C. **Saint:** "One born of the water and spirit and therefore is a child of God, in the kingdom of God."

Local Church
Sponsoring Church
4. Every Christian should want and strive to do **"good unto all men"** and therefore we should do good to everyone that we can. But the question before us is not whether a Christian should do good, but rather how has God allowed **His church to function** in the caring for the needy.

5. **What is the work of the church in the area of Benevolence?**
 - A. **Does the church operate in the field of Limited Benevolence (just take care of certain ones), or:**
 - B. **Does the church operate in the field of Unlimited Benevolence (care for all the world's needy)?**

6. **Some argue:** "whatever the church can do the individual can do and whatever the individual can do the church can do."
 - A. **This is faulty reasoning. Individuals pay taxes - but the church does not. In 1 Timothy 5 Individuals must care for the widows except under certain circumstances as stipulated in the text, "the church is not to be charged".**

Majority of Benevolent Work is to Be Done by Individuals

1. We must understand that God restricted the work of benevolence.

2 Thessalonians 3:10 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.

A. This is strong language. Laziness is a sin that must not be tolerated.

- 1) Those that aid individuals that won't work due to laziness becomes a partaker of their sin.
- 2) God has always expected each individual to stand on his own two feet and do for himself as he is able and has opportunity. **This leads to another restriction:**

2. Each one is to be responsible for his own family as he is able. This includes aged parents and other relatives. The Bible teaches: **1 Timothy 5:4,8,16**

A. Notice also that the care of widows is restricted.

James 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep **oneself** unspotted from the world.

- 1) This passage of scripture teaches that this work belongs to **INDIVIDUALS**, and not the **CHURCH**.

3. If these guidelines were followed today, welfare rolls would be drastically reduced, and the church would not be burdened.

Benevolence is Not a Tool to Bring People into Christ

1. **Benevolence has never been intended to be a tool to bring others into Christ, or to keep them faithful.**
 - A. **We have the Power of the Gospel - the Word of God to do that.**

2. **Don't you think that there were poor people in Asia and Southeastern Europe when the apostle Paul was on his preaching tours?**
 - A. **We do not read about where Paul ever used clothes, food or money to entice people to obey the gospel. True discipleship cannot be bought with material goods.**

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

John 6:44-45 No one can come to Me **unless the Father who sent Me draws him**; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore **everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.**

- B. **Benevolent tactics were used after WW II. Baptisms came easy, the building overflowed, but when the "loaves and fishes" ran out, so did the "CONVERTS." (Weren't really converted, were they?)**

New Testament Teaching on Benevolence

1. There are nine groups of Bible passages of scripture in the New Testament on benevolence that is the responsibility of the local church.

SEE CHART: "The Benevolent Work of the Church"

2. Let's look at each one of these passages and then determine:
 - A. **who administered the relief** (local church, sponsoring church, benevolent society)
 - B. **Who were relieved** (Saint, Alien, Orphan).
 - 1) Jerusalem
 - a) Administered: Local Church; Who: Saints
Acts 2:44-45 "all who believed"
 - b) Administered: Local Church; Who: Saints
Acts 4:32-35 "those who believed"
 - c) Administered: Local Church; Who: Saints
Acts 6:1-6 "disciples were multiplying"
 1. Note: the church at Jerusalem took care of its needy without establishing an organization under a board of directors. The local church attended to its own work.
 - 2) Antioch
 - a) Administered: Local Church; Who: Saints
Acts 11:27-30 "the disciples; to the brethren"

Brother R.L. Whiteside wrote: “Here again we see a manifestation of the benevolent spirit of the early Christians, a demonstration of what a church can do in helping the needy. The gospel of Christ puts that sort of spirit into all who come under its influence. Every church of God is therefore a benevolent society, and Christians need no other society in which to do such work.”

3) Macedonia and Achaia.

- a) **Administered: Local Church; Who: Saints**
Romans 15:25-32 “for the poor among the saints”
- b) **Administered: Local Church; Who: Saints**
1 Corinthians 16:1-3 “for the saints”
- c) **Administered: Local Church; Who: Saints**
2 Corinthians 8:1-4 “of the ministering to the saints”
- d) **Administered: Local Church; Who: Saints**
2 Corinthians 9:1, 12 “ministering to the saints; needs of the saints”

4) Widows Indeed:

- a) **Administered: Local Church; Who: Saints**

1 Timothy 5:16 If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, **that it may relieve those who are really widows.**

New Testament Benevolence

Unquestionably right!

3. From the foregoing cases we conclude that the church can help **any saint**, or **group of saints**, that has a genuine need. **Widows indeed** are permanent charges of the church.
 - A. Nothing in these cases suggest that a congregation should go into all the world looking for needy people and support as many as possible.
 - B. The church has a higher function than the social and temporal betterment of humanity.
 - C. The church is not a glorified Rescue Mission for the world's indigent or a Red Cross kind of organization.
 - D. To keep the benevolent work of the church in its proper perspective we need to study and **follow the New Testament**, not what other religious bodies are doing!

Conclusion

1. The Christian life is a training school for eternity.
 - A. We must learn kindness, piety, compassion, gentleness, tenderness and love.
2. God wants His people to become personally involved in service, not the mere giving of money through some agency.
 - A. We should strive to do whatever we can do as individuals.
 - B. But let the church do only what it is authorized to do based on New Testament example.
3. Let the church be occupied with the seeking and saving of the lost soul **through the gospel of Jesus Christ**.

