

PAUL'S TEACHING ON BENEVOLENCE AND CHURCH COOPERATION

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The subject of benevolence and the subject of church cooperation are two entirely different subjects. Perhaps until about forty to forty-five years ago we would not think of discussing them together. But in the fifties and sixties a new kind of anti-ism swept through the church. (I do not use the word *anti-ism* to be ugly, though I know some would object to being referred to in that way. Those who use instruments in worship refer to us as being *anti*. I do not object to that term, nor do I feel insulted by it.) This new kind of anti-ism was characterized primarily by two doctrines: (1) the doctrine that it is a sin for churches to contribute to the support of any who are not saints, and (2) the doctrine that one church cannot contribute money to another church for the purpose of assisting the receiving church in evangelism. It is unlikely that one would find a preacher who believes one of these doctrines who does not also believe the other.

It will be necessary, however, for us to discuss these two doctrines separately. The one thing they have in common is that they both bind where God has not bound.

BENEVOLENCE

Both the Old and New Testaments abundantly teach that God's people should be a compassionate and benevolent people. The apostle Paul himself had a great deal to say about our duty toward those poor and in need. In Galatians 2:10 he wrote that he was forward to remember the poor. In Acts 20:35 he said, "I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." In Romans 12:8 he mentions showing mercy. In First Corinthians 13:3 he mentions one's bestowing all his goods to

feed the poor. The collection we read about in First Corinthians 16 and in Second Corinthians 8 and 9 is a collection taken to relieve those who were in need. In Ephesians 4:28 Paul commands, "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." He also wrote, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10).

Our brethren who differ with us on the benevolent work of the church do not deny the Christian's responsibility to be compassionate and benevolent. Rather they say the benevolent work of the church is limited to those who are members of the church. They quote First Corinthians 16:1-2: "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." That says the collection is for the saints, and they conclude that "saints" means "saints only," just as those in the denominational world think salvation by faith means "faith only." Individual Christians, they say, have a responsibility to help the needy of the world, but the church can help, in a benevolent way, only those who are members of the church. One brother even signed a proposition for debate that reads as follows: "The Bible teaches it is a sin for the church to take money from its treasury to buy food for hungry, destitute children, and those who do so will go to hell." Now, all of those whom we refer to as anti brethren will ridicule that proposition, and say it is not what they believe. However, I have, on a number of occasions, added just four words to that proposition, and asked these brethren if they will deny believing it, and not one of them has yet so done. The four words are, "who are not Christians." The whole proposition would then read, "The Bible teaches it is a sin for the church to take money from its

treasury to buy food for hungry, destitute children *who are not Christians*, and those who do so will go to hell." See if you can get one of these anti brethren to deny that proposition.

Now, I want to make it plain, that is not what they want to talk about when they discuss the orphan home question--whether the church can buy food for hungry, destitute children. They prefer to talk about the organization of the home itself, the fact it has a board of directors, is incorporated, is a separate institution from the church, and the like. But why talk about those matters, if it is sinful for the church to feed orphan children? Why discuss the scripturalness of certain methods of doing a thing if the thing itself is unscriptural. There is no scriptural method of doing a thing which itself is unscriptural. There is no scriptural method of producing instrumental music to be used in worship, for instrumental music itself is unscriptural in worship. If it were unscriptural for the church to contribute to the care of orphan children who are not members of the church, then it would be useless to discuss the scripturalness or unscripturalness of the kind of home in which it could be done.

But in order to avoid confusion, let us answer this one question: What is an orphans home? An orphans home is that which takes the place of the natural home which children have lost. When children lose their natural home for whatever reason, they need something to take the place of that home which has been lost. The church is not a substitute for that home or any other home. The church may establish a substitute home, but the church is not a home. The church may assist a substitute home which has been established by individual Christians, just as it could have assisted the natural home before it was destroyed. But the church itself is not a home.

One may ask, "Where in the New Testament do we find chapter and verse for such

homes as Childhaven?" The answer to that is there is no verse in the New Testament which tells us what kind of home orphan children should have. And those who ask for chapter and verse for such homes would say that orphan children should be adopted into private homes. To that I would reply, where is the verse that says so? You see, any arrangement for providing care for orphan children will be an arrangement dictated by human judgment, for the Bible simply does not tell us what kind of arrangement to make. Even if they are adopted into the home of Christians, that would be a humanly devised plan, for the Bible does not say we are to do it that way.

Paul wrote in First Timothy 5:16: "If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed." Here is a command for Christians to relieve those widows for whom they are individually responsible. But the apostle does not dictate the details. If that widow is sound enough in body and mind to live in her own home, one might relieve that widow by providing funds to enable her to do so. If she is not sound in body or mind, he might hire one to move in with her and take care of her, or he might move her into his own home and provide the actual care himself. He might even arrange for her to live in some institutional home designed to care for those like her. In any case, he would be doing what the passage says do; he would be relieving that widow.

That same passage also says the church is charged with relieving certain ones. But the Bible no more dictates to the church how it is to relieve those in its charge than it does to the individual. If the church were to provide the funds for the widow to live in her own home and care for herself, would it be relieving her? If it hired someone to move in with her and care for her, would it be relieving her? If the church arranged for her to move in with someone else who could care for her, would it be doing what that verse suggests? Or

if it arranged for her to live in some institutional home established for that purpose, would it be providing relief?

But there is another point that needs to be made, and that is that neither widows nor orphan children can be provided for or relieved without a home of some kind. Several years ago I was involved in a somewhat private debate over this matter, and the preacher I was debating hung up a chart to illustrate the duty of the church and the individual to provide relief for those who are their respective responsibilities. This preacher was trying to show that providing such relief is the responsibility of the church, and that those who support orphans homes are substituting another institution to do that which God intends the church to do. When I arose to speak, I drew three blank lines on the chalkboard, and asked that preacher in his next speech to write the name and address of one widow or orphan being taken care of by the church and without a home of some kind. Do you suppose he did it? No! Even though he was contending that is the way the passage demands it be done, he could not name one person who was being cared for by the church without a home of some sort.

Those who oppose church contributions to the orphans homes among us think the orphans homes are parallel to the missionary society. They say those homes, like the missionary society, are separate organizations from the church, and yet are doing the work of the church. It is true that the homes are separate organizations from the church, but the homes are doing the work of the home, and not of the church. When the orphans home does all its work, the church still has all its work to do. Just as my home is not organized to do the work God designed the church to do, even so the substitute home is not organized to do the work God designed the church to do. The church sustains the same relationship to the substitute home that it sustained to the natural home before it

was destroyed. The church also sustains the same obligations to the substitute home that it sustained to the natural home before it was destroyed. And the substitute home is no more in competition with the church than is my home or yours.

But I would emphasize the fact that the issue is not what kind of home is a scriptural home, but rather is it scriptural for the church to aid in a benevolent way little children who are not members of the body of Christ? That is the issue. If it is not, then it wouldn't matter what kind of arrangement the church made to do the job, it would be engaged in an unscriptural practice.

Does "saints" mean "saints only"? Or does the church have a responsibility to any other than saints? The Book of Galatians was written "unto the churches of Galatia" (Gal. 1:2). To those churches the apostle wrote: "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). Notice, please, that those churches were told to do good unto all men. Would it be a sin for those churches to do what they were told to do?

Notice another passage: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (Jas. 1:27). This verse tells what pure religion is. Can the church practice pure religion? According to the "saints only" advocates, the definition of pure religion would be just the opposite of that for the church. According to them, pure religion for the church would be "not to visit the fatherless," and churches that do visit the fatherless who are not saints are judged as being guilty of sin. For the individual, pure religion is one thing, but for the church it is the very opposite.

This is seen also in the general teaching of the Bible. Jesus said,
But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That

ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? [Matthew 5:44-47].

Can the church obey these admonitions? Can it love its enemies, or is this to the individual only? Can it pray for the ones who persecute it? Can it partake of the nature of the Father in heaven, or would that be a sin? According to the "saints only" doctrine, the individual Christian would sin if he did good only to those who do good to him, but the church would sin if it did good to any except its own members. "And if ye salute your brethren only [notice that--*brethren only*], what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?" If the "saints only" doctrine were true, it would mean that the church not only does no more than man-made churches; it would mean it does far less than any man-made church and any of the civic organizations. Who can believe, in view of what Jesus said right here in the Sermon on the Mount, that one criterion for determining the faithfulness of a congregation is that it cannot be guilty of buying food for hungry, destitute children who are not saints?

CHURCH COOPERATION

When we talk about church cooperation we are not talking about whether or not it is scriptural for churches to cooperate. It is rather a question of how churches can cooperate. Specifically, can one or more churches send money to one church to aid that church in some evangelistic effort? So far as I know, such a practice was never called into question until the Fifth and Highland church in Abilene decided to start the *Herald of*

Truth radio program and asked other congregations to assist in a financial way. Contributions were sent by other churches to Fifth and Highland, whose responsibility it was to pay the bills and to see that the necessary arrangements were made for the program. That was a scriptural arrangement, as we will show.

But before we talk about that, I want to go on record here as saying I do not believe the present arrangement of the *Herald of Truth* is a scriptural arrangement. When it began, it was a radio program sponsored by the church and under its elders. Today it is a non-profit corporation under a board of directors. It is no longer a program, but a separate organization from the church, soliciting and receiving funds from churches to produce radio and television programs, publish magazines, conduct seminars, and even send out missionaries. Funds sent from churches go directly to this organization, and not to the church. If this is scriptural, then we have been in error in opposing missionary societies. Now, just in case someone wants to know if I have gone directly to the people involved in the *Herald of Truth* and told them these things, the answer is yes.

Now, the kind of cooperation that characterized the *Herald of Truth* in the beginning is a scriptural kind of cooperation. It is what some refer to as the sponsoring church arrangement, in which one congregation assumes responsibility for a particular work, and then receives funds from other churches to help finance that work. Many of those we refer to as missionaries work under this arrangement. Is this arrangement authorized in the New Testament? I plan to show that it is, and I will do so in the same way one would go about showing that paying the preacher out of the church treasury, or building a meetinghouse with funds from the church treasury is authorized. That is, I will show that all the elements of church-to-church contributions in evangelism are scriptural elements. When I have done this, then I will have shown that no scriptural principle is

violated when one church contributes to another church to assist that church in doing some evangelistic work.

In Acts 11:22-26 the Bible tells us that the church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch. Barnabas taught and exhorted the saints at Antioch to cleave to the Lord. Some time later he went to Tarsus to seek Saul, and the two of them taught much people at Antioch. Here is a case where one church helped another in edification and evangelism.

Later, in Acts 13, this same Barnabas was sent along with Saul on what we sometimes refer to as Paul's first missionary journey. Since the church at Jerusalem had sent Barnabas to Antioch, could we say that Jerusalem assisted Antioch in preaching the gospel in the places where Paul and Barnabas went on that first journey?

In Acts 15 the church at Jerusalem helped the church at Antioch in dealing with a problem created by Judaizing teachers. Growing out of this, Judas and Silas were sent from Jerusalem with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch. They carried with them a message of divine instruction to the church at Antioch (verse 22). But from Antioch the message was to go to churches in Syria and Cilicia (verse 23). Here we have Jerusalem assisting Antioch in getting an inspired message to other churches. Incidentally, this would be relieving a need toward which Jerusalem and Antioch were equally related.

In Acts 11:27-30 some prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch, and one of them delivered an inspired message to the church at Antioch concerning a great dearth that would come upon all the world. Antioch, in return, took up a collection, and sent relief to the brethren in Judea. This relief was sent to the elders of the church. Notice, please, that the autonomy of the church was not violated when funds they had contributed were sent to the elders in Judea for distribution. It was not a case of the Jerusalem church's having control over funds which belonged to Antioch.

From First Corinthians 16:1-2, Second Corinthians 8 and 9, Romans 15:26, and other passages, we learn that a number of churches collected funds to send to Jerusalem. This collection was taken to Jerusalem by Paul and his company, and was obviously delivered to the elders of the church the day after Paul arrived in Jerusalem (Acts 21:17-20). Question: Did these contributing churches lose their autonomy? Was this a case of centralized control?

In Colossians 4:16 the church at Colossae is commanded to send a book of the New Testament to the church at Laodicea. They were also to get a letter that Paul wrote to Laodicea and read it to the Colossian church. Question: Can a church send a book of the New Testament to be read to another church? If so, could it send the entire New Testament? Would it be right to send a copy of the New Testament, but wrong to send money to a church to assist that church to purchase a New Testament?

Paul wrote: "I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service" (II Corinthians 11:8). Here is a case in which a plurality of churches supported Paul to enable him to preach the gospel at Corinth. This is cooperation in the field of evangelism. And I think I can make a pretty good argument to show that those churches did not all send their money directly to Paul. Look at Philippians 4:15: "Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only." If you look at the record in Acts you will observe that when Paul left Macedonia, he did not tarry very long at any of the places he stopped until he came to Corinth. At Corinth he stayed a year and six months (Acts 18:11). This had to be the occasion he refers to when he says he robbed other churches to do service to the Corinthians. But to the Philippians he said that they were the only church that communicated with him "concerning giving and

receiving." That strongly suggests that the Philippian church received funds from other churches and gave them to Paul while he was at Corinth. Yes, I know that Philippians 4:16 specifically mentions Thessalonica as one place he was when they sent help to him, but Thessalonica is in Macedonia, and it was when he departed from Macedonia that verse 15 talks about.

I have shown from these passages that every essential element of church-to-church contributions in evangelism is scriptural. If every element of an arrangement is scriptural, then the whole arrangement is scriptural. I have shown it is in harmony with the scriptures (1) for one church to assist another church, (2) for one or more churches to send money to another church, (3) for one church to assist another church in evangelism, and (4) that no church loses its autonomy when these things take place. In other words, when one or more churches contribute money to another church to assist the receiving church in some evangelistic effort, every element of this arrangement is in harmony with the Scriptures. Therefore, the entire arrangement is in harmony with the Scriptures.

If the argument I have made here is not valid, then there is not a man here who can justify using the contribution authorized in First Corinthians 16:1-2 to pay a man for preaching the gospel, to build and maintain a meetinghouse, or anything else except benevolent work. How would one set about to justify the use of the contribution of First Corinthians 16:1-2 for building a meetinghouse or paying a preacher without using the very same kind of argument I have here used to show that one church may contribute to another church to assist the receiving church in some evangelistic effort?

What I have said about this matter is just exactly what faithful brethren in general believed, practiced, and defended up until the last half of this century. I have lived in the Birmingham area since 1958, and that area has been and still is one of the strongholds of

the position I am refuting today. I believe I can prove that every church of Christ in the Birmingham area which was in existence prior to 1950 has practiced the very kind of cooperation which nearly half of them now contend is sinful. For example, newspaper ads appeared in the *Birmingham News* on a weekly basis from May 1945 until August 1954. I have copies of some of those ads, including what I believe is the last one. It appeared on August 28, 1954, and it was paid for by the Seventy-Seventh Street Church of Christ. Twenty-five churches sent money to that one church so it could pay for this newspaper ad. Fourteen of those churches later decided that kind of church cooperation is wrong.

In the October 1946 issue of *The Way of Life*, brother Herschel E. Patton, who later opposed this kind of cooperation, announced a radio program. The contract for the program was between WTNB and the Woodlawn Church of Christ. Other congregations in Birmingham contributed to the support of the program. Their checks were made payable to the Woodlawn Church of Christ. Woodlawn deposited those checks, and then wrote one check to the radio station to pay the bill.

In the article that announced the program, brother Patton wrote, "The churches of Christ in Birmingham have always presented a united front..." Yes, that is true. And we could still have that unity today if some had not departed from the ground upon which we all once stood united.

In another part of the country about this same time, brother Roy E. Cogdill was writing the introduction to *God's Prophetic Word*, a book of sermons preached by Foy E. Wallace, Jr. in what came to be known as the Houston Music Hall Meeting, January 21-28, 1945. Brother Cogdill wrote in the introduction to the book:

In order that the meeting might be carried out on a scriptural basis and without provoking criticism, the Norhill Church decided to sponsor the meeting, guaranteeing all expenses incurred, and simply extend an invitation to the other Churches[sic] of

Christ to have whatever part in the meeting, financially and otherwise, they wanted to have.

He further wrote:

Twenty churches worked together as one throughout the effort and the Churches[sic] of Christ in Houston demonstrated the practical side of Christian unity and above all the sufficiency of the Lord's church in the accomplishment of His work without the interference of human organizations. All of the funds were handled through the treasury of the Norhill church and all bills incurred paid out of that treasury with a complete report furnished each congregation assisting. [*God's Prophetic Word*, by Foy E. Wallace, Jr. Introduction by Roy E. Cogdill, pages v and vi.]

Some of you already know brother Cogdill debated brother Guy N. Woods in Birmingham in 1957, and in that debate he took the position that this very type of cooperation is wrong.

Incidentally, this quotation from the pen of brother Cogdill is from the early editions of *God's Prophetic Word*. His introduction was not included in some of the later editions of the book.

Is there any way for those who differ over this matter to be united? I am tempted to say we were united at one time, and we can be united again if those who have forsaken the position all of us once defended as being scriptural would return to that position they have forsaken. But I realize some have honest scruples, and cannot conscientiously practice what all faithful brethren practiced without question until the last half of this century. On the other hand, some would say, "We can be united if you brethren would just quit defending or practicing that kind of cooperation that characterized all of us during the forties and fifties." But we cannot conscientiously give up this position, because of such passages as First Timothy 4:1-4 and Galatians 2:1-5. Then is there any way we can be united?

Let me give you an example I believe is worthy of imitation. In September of 1951, at the Lebanon Church of Christ near Piedmont, Alabama, brother Gus Nichols and brother Cecil Abercrombie debated the Bible class question. The Lebanon church was opposed to simultaneous Bible classes. When the debate was over the brethren at Lebanon still had their scruples about Bible classes, but they had come to realize they had done wrong in allowing their scruples to be a wedge dividing brethren. They agreed to extend fellowship to churches which had Bible classes if those churches would extend fellowship to them, even though they continued not to have classes. Peace and unity was restored on that basis, and from that day forward those churches quit condemning each other. Not only so, but they announced and attended each other's meetings, singings and the like.

The apostle Paul wrote,
Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth [I Tim. 4:1-3].

Notice what the apostle refers to as "doctrines of devils": "Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats." Marriage, along with eating meats, is optional. Being married or being unmarried is not a mark of holiness. Neither is eating or not eating meats. But for one to make a law about an optional matter and demand that all abide by that law is to teach "doctrines of devils." Suppose I believe it is sinful to eat meats. I can be a faithful Christian and never eat another bite of meat. But suppose I try to bind my scruples about the matter upon the entire church, and that to the point of causing

division within the body of Christ. Then I am guilty of teaching "doctrines of devils."

We certainly have no right to treat matters of faith as if they were nothing more than opinion. This is what is being done by those in the denominational world and by many of our own brethren. But we also have no right to treat matters of opinion as if they were matters of faith.