

THE WORK OF THE CHURCH (PART 1)

When I use the word “church” I am mostly referring to the Church of Christ as I am not familiar enough with all denominations to delve into their policies. I may reference other denominations where I am familiar with their policy, but the intent of this study is to examine what the Bible teaches on the subject, not necessarily what other denominations may teach.

As we get into this study, it is important to note that the church exists for three purposes:

- Preaching and teaching the gospel;
- Edification of its members; and
- Benevolent works.

EVANGELISM/PREACHING TO THE LOST

Of the three works listed above, evangelism and preaching to the lost would have to be the number one priority of the church. Without the continued evangelism to the lost the church would die.

Matthew 28:18-20

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.”

Mark 16:15

“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.’”

Romans 10:14-15

“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!’”

1 Corinthians 1:17-18

“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. Christ the Power and Wisdom of God For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

2 Timothy 4:1-5

“I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

These passages clearly point to the importance of preaching for the continuation of the church.

EDIFICATION OF ITS MEMBERS

Edification is a very important work of the church. Edification is sometimes confused with benevolence. To edify means to build up or strengthen. Edification is done at the individual level and the church level.

The individual and the church both need to be edified to continue, to grow, and to please God.

Edification at the Individual Level

Christians are required to edify each other and those in the world. The following passages address individual edification.

Romans 14:19

“Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.”

Romans 15:2

“Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.”

Romans 15:14

“Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.”

1 Corinthians 10:23-24

“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being.”

During the time of this writing the church was divided over the issue of eating meat offered to idols. Idol worship was rampant during this time.

There were all sorts of pagan gods that the idolaters sacrificed animals to. The idolatrous priest would often take the sacrificed meat and sell it to the markets and keep the money. People that purchased this meat may or may not know that it was a piece of sacrificed meat. The early Christians were afraid that if they ate meat that was sacrificed to a pagan god that they would be sinning. Other Christians knew that meat offered to an idol did not have any type of sin attached to it. The meat was just meat. Paul was saying here that it did not violate his conscience to eat meat offered to idols, so it was okay if he did. Paul was saying that if his eating of meat offered to idols offended anyone that he would not do so because it might create hard feeling which are contrary to edification. He did not want to be a stumbling block to someone else.

The second part of this thought is found in verse 24. The word “wealth” is not mentioned in the Greek text. It reads “let no man seek his own, but that which is of another.” The word is referring to everything that pertains to another’s comfort, usefulness, happiness, or salvation.

In other words, put the other man’s feelings in front of your own so you do not offend him, and he is edified by you.

1 Thessalonians 5:11

“Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.”

Hebrews 10:24

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works...”

Jude 20

“But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit...”

Edification at the Church Level

The church plays an important role in edification. Coming together to study the Bible keeps us on the same page. It keeps us from being tossed here and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine as described in Ephesians 4:14.

How Does the Church Edify?

It is hard to be edified when you stand alone. We need to feed on each other's passion, each other's knowledge, and each other's strength.

There is a reason that we meet on Sunday mornings. There is strength in numbers. Let us look at some of the reasons we meet:

- To worship God;
- To partake of the Lord's Supper;
- To teach and be taught;
- To sing songs; and
- To build one another up (edify)

To Worship God

We are commanded to assemble ourselves together. We are told in Matthew 18:20 that *"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."*

Hebrews 10:25

"...not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

To Partake of the Lord's Supper

Jesus instituted what we know as the Lord's Supper in Matthew 26:26-29:

“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.’”

To Teach and Be Taught

There are a lot of reasons that we should attend worship studies. In Acts 2:42 we see that the early Christians devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

The early church was very zealous and desired to learn the truth.
1 Corinthians 14:12

“Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.”

Paul went on to say in verse 26 to let all things be done for edification.

1 Corinthians 14:26

“How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.”

Paul told the church in Ephesus to “Edify itself in love.” Someone might be speaking in tongues. Someone else may be interpreting what is said. Someone else may be prophesying. The idea here is to do things decently and in order. People should not be talking at the same time and talking over each other. This just makes things confusing and no one will be getting anything out of it. One person should present his gift and sit down. The next person would present his gift and sit down so that the entire group is benefited (edified) by the experience.

Ephesians 4:11-16

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

The edification of the church is accomplished by the teaching and preaching of the word of God. When Christians are taught from the word of God what their responsibilities are, they are edified, or built up. When the entire church works together, and everyone does their part it is a pleasure to go to church and everyone is edified by being there. When you have people that are not doing their fair share, it does just the opposite. The body has to work together. Can you imagine if your left leg grew twice as fast as your right leg? Or, if you get up to move and one leg refuses to do its part? You would not walk very well under either one of these conditions. Suppose you were hungry, and your hands refused to pick up a fork to feed you? The whole body would suffer. Eventually, the entire body might die. But when all of the parts work together, the brain tells you to get up and go to work to earn a living. The eyes show your body how to get there. Your legs take you there. The arms and hands do the work. The body working together earns a living and is able to support itself. It has food, clothing and shelter. The entire body is happy and grows in harmony. The same holds true for the church.

Hebrews 10:24

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works...”

To Sing Songs

Singing is a great form of edification. Everyone loves to sing. Singing together just makes you feel good. When you sing, you build each other up. However, singing in church is actually commanded.

Colossians 3:16

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

Ephesians 5:18-19

“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord...”

To Build One Another Up

Going to church and being around like-minded Christians is extremely edifying. Let us look at some passages that confirm this.

Romans 14:19

“Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.”

Romans 15:2

“Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.”

Ephesians 4:12

“...for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ...”

1 Thessalonians 5:11

“Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.”

It is interesting to note that in all of these incidents of edification we have reviewed in the scriptures, none of them directly mention giving someone money or paying their bills.

We also do not see any examples of social activities taking place during the acts of edification we reviewed.

We have to be very careful when we say that benevolence is an act of edification.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the primary work of the church?
2. Would the church continue without evangelism?
3. What does the word edification mean?
4. Do you think that edification is a part of benevolence?
5. Is attending services a part of edification?

6. Is edification the work of the church or the individual?

7. Is partaking of the Lord's supper a form of edification?

8. Is singing a form of edification?

9. Name some of the things that we do during services to promote edification.

Additional Notes:

THE WORK OF THE CHURCH (PART 2)

BENEVOLENCE/BENEVOLENT WORKS

Romans 15:26

“For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.” (AJKV)

The subject of church benevolence, and how the church should distribute or use its money, has long been a source of anguish and controversy in congregations all over the country. We all believe that we should be good stewards of God’s money. A steward is a person who manages another’s property or financial affairs. They actually do not own the property or money that they have charge over. This is important to remember as we examine this subject.

The word “benevolence” is not mentioned in most versions of the Bible. The American Standard, The New King James, and others make no mention of the word. It is used once in the King James Version in 1 Corinthians 7:3. In this case it is being used to describe the marriage relationship. The Kings James reads:

“Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband.”

Other versions use the word “affection” instead of “benevolence.”

BENEVOLENCE DEFINED

Merriam-Webster defines benevolence as:

1. Disposition to do good
2. a) An act of Kindness; b) A generous gift.

The King James Bible Dictionary defines benevolence and benevolent as:

benevolence

BENEV'OLENCE, n. L. benevolentia, of bene, well and volo, to will or wish. See Will.

1. The disposition to do good; good will; kind-ness; charitableness; the love, of mankind, accompanied with a desire to promote their happiness.

The benevolence of God is one of his moral attributes; that attribute which delights in the happiness of intelligent beings. "God is love." 1 John 4.

2. An act of kindness; good done; charity given.
3. A species of contribution or tax illegally exacted by arbitrary kings of England.

benevolent

BENEV'OLENT, a. L. benevolens, of bene and volo.

Having a disposition to do good; possessing love to mankind, and a desire to promote their prosperity and happiness; kind.

While the Bible does not use the word "benevolence" throughout the inspired books, there are many passages that require us to act in ways that meet most of these definitions.

As we strive to live our Christian lives and comply with the scriptures on the subject of benevolence, we are faced with questions such as:

- What is the difference between individual and church responsibility?
- When and to whom does the church offer assistance?
- When is benevolence withheld from the Saints?

- Is the church required to verify the legitimacy of the request?
- Does the church have any responsibility as to how the assistance is used?
- How much should the church offer as assistance?
- How does the church handle the distribution of support?
and
- What are the individual requirements to help the needy?

This study will address each of these questions and explore what the scriptures have to say regarding each of these questions.

This study is being written as an apologetic on the use of church funds for the needy. The word apologetic has taken on a new meaning from the way it was originally used. The original definition of apologetic simply means a “defense.”

This issue seems to be more prevalent in the Church of Christ than it does anywhere else. Our society as a whole has become more liberal over time and our country has become more of a welfare state than it was in times past.

People have become more tolerant of those who are un-willing to support themselves when there are things that these individuals could be doing to make themselves a productive member of society.

Sometimes the Church of Christ is looked at negatively or gets an undeserved reputation as being hard hearted or un-caring because they do not hand out money to anyone and everyone that asks. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Church of Christ is one of the most compassionate and benevolent groups of people found anywhere. But, it must be under the right circumstances.

It should be noted that God never intended for benevolence to be used as a tool to bring people into Christ or to keep them faithful.

Since this seems to be such a controversial subject, we will try to examine all aspects of the subject and see exactly what the scriptures have to say by looking at the passages listed in the New Testament that deal with benevolence and see what conclusions can be drawn. These scriptures will be

presented as accurately as possible. No liberties, distortions, or mis-quotes will be taken with the text.

It is important as you undertake this study that you have an open mind. You will not be able to objectively see both points of view if you enter into the study with a preconceived opinion.

Samuel G. Dawson wrote a booklet titled "Benevolence." In it he listed four possible attitudes one might have when studying the subject.[i]

1. "I know what I believe, and you are not teaching it."
2. "I know what I believe, and God's word must fit."
3. "How can I get around this teaching and still be pleasing to God?"
4. "We might have the attitude of Samuel in I Samuel 3:10, 'Speak; for thy servant heareth.'"

Note: The first three bullets list the wrong attitude for someone wishing to comply with the word of God. The fourth bullet exhibits the proper attitude that we should have as we study the scriptures.

"Christians" tend to be compassionate, and, as a result, givers. There are many examples in the Bible of people doing good deeds for others whether the recipient was a Christian or not. Church benevolence is always directed at Christians that met certain qualifications.

We read in Galatians 6: 9-10:

"Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. 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."

Then in Hebrews 13:16 we read:

"And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

The lines seem to get blurred between collective (church) and individual responsibilities.

As you start to read this study you might ask, does it really matter? After all, we are just trying to do good and please and glorify God.

We are told in 2 Timothy 2:15 to rightly divide the word of truth. *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”*

This means when we come before God on the Day of Judgment we will be approved or rejected based on how we divided the word of truth.

We are warned in Galatians 1:6-9 not to pervert the gospel; *“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.”* We read in Proverbs 30:5-6, *“Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.”* Lastly, we read in Revelation 22:18-19, *“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”*

As you can see from these passages, we have a great responsibility to study the words that God gave us and ensure that we rightly divide them. We must strictly adhere to the commands and examples of the New Testament. Personal feelings or beliefs have no place in the interpretation of the scriptures.

We walk a fine line every day in our Christian lives as we strive to please God, be a good example, and lead others to Him. There are people that prey on Christians and are willing to take as much from them that they are willing to give. They know all of the right things to say to tug on your heart strings

and portray themselves as victims that need your help. If you are not careful, you can be swindled to give more than you can really afford and to someone that is not really deserving of it. God does not expect you to be gullible.

We read in Deuteronomy 15:7-11:

“If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs. Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, ‘The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,’ and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing, and he cry out to the Lord against you, and it become sin among you. You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand. For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.’”

Luke 6:34-35

“And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.”

Luke 14:14

“And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

Isaiah 58:10-11

*“If you extend your soul to the hungry And satisfy the afflicted soul,
Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, And your darkness shall*

be as the noon-day. The Lord will guide you continually, And satisfy your soul in drought, And strengthen your bones; You shall be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail."

Matthew 26:6-11:

"And when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table. But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, 'Why this waste? For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor.' But when Jesus was aware of it, He said to them, 'Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always.'"

Jesus was not being insensitive toward the poor. He recognized that human nature being what it is, that there will always be poor people due to a wide range of reasons from laziness, drunkenness, bad luck, etc. No economic system can survive in a world where money is given to those who do not work for it. Human nature being what it is causes those that do work to question why they are working so hard for so little when those who are not working are getting handouts nearly equivalent to their own. As a result, they stop working and go on the hand out system. As more and more do this, the system spirals out of control and eventually collapses.

Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 3: 8-15:

"nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If any-one will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busy-bodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. And if anyone does not

obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

1 Timothy 5:13-15

"And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproach-fully. For some have already turned aside after Satan."

1 Peter 4:15

"But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters."

Whether it is the church or the individual doing the giving, we have to determine the sincerity of the need and set boundaries.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does the word apologetic mean?
2. What is your definition of benevolence?
3. How many times is the word "benevolence" mentioned in the Bible?

4. Please list those scriptures.

5. In what context is the word "benevolence" used in the Bible?

6. Before beginning this study, do you believe there is difference between the responsibilities of the church as a group and the individual?

7. Do you believe that people inside the church have become tolerant of those who cannot or will not work?

8. Do you believe that Christians tend to be very compassionate?

9. Do you believe that benevolence is a useful tool to get non-Christians to attend worship services where they will hear the gospel?

10. Based on this short section, do you feel that it is important to follow the scriptures to the letter, or do you feel that we have some latitude where there is not a "thou shall" or "thou shall not"?

11. Can you provide scriptures to support your position?

12. What does Galatians 6:9 say should happen to anyone that teaches any other gospel than what you have received?

13. What does Proverbs 30: 5-6 say will happen to us if we add to Gods words?

14. What does Revelation 22:18 say will happen to one that adds to God's word?

15. What does Revelation 22:19 say will happen to one that takes away from God's word?

16. What does it mean for God to take away our part from the Book of Life?

17. Will we be lost if we change, alter, or fail to follow God's word?

18. Do you believe that people often approach the church for assistance when they are undeserving of help? This question applies to both Christians and non-Christians.

19. Do you believe that Jesus was aware of this?

20. What was Paul's feeling about people that would not work?

21. Complete the verse from Deuteronomy 15:7. "If there is a poor man with you, one of your _____, in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor _____;"

22. How many times is the word "brother used in verses 7-11?

23. How many times do these verses say to help someone that is not a brother?

24. What did Jesus say about the poor in Matthew 26:11?

25. What kind of example did Paul and the apostles set for the people in 2 Thessalonians 3:8-10?

Additional Notes:

HOW TO USE THE INSTRUCTOR'S MANUAL

There are three key features contained in the Instructor's Manual that make it different from the Student Manual. These are designed to aid the one who is leading a class or study group through this material.

1. Additional comments from the author – These provide further explanation about the points made in the material and help transition from one point to another. These comments are differentiated from the main text with an arrow and different typestyle.

Ephesians 4:28

"Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need."

- This verse is a caution against those who choose to steal rather than to work and earn the money to get what he needs. Those that will not work are easily drawn into temptation to steal. Laziness often breeds theft. The second half of this verse points out that men should work so that not only can they support themselves, but they will have abundance to give to those less fortunate. We should be charitable to those that are not able to work.

2. Page breaks in the Student Manual – This shows where in the material the page breaks fall in the Student Manual, along with listing the page number, so that a teacher can easily direct a student to the correct page in his/her book or find the page number referenced by a student. These are page breaks are labeled between the lines of text where the break occurs in the Student Manual.

"determine" to give, you should do so each and every time. You should not give grudgingly or of necessity because if you do not give cheerfully, your gift will do you no good.

Student's Version – Page 93

Malachi 3:8

"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings."

3. Answers to the discussion questions – The author's answers to the questions in the book are included in a different typestyle (the same typestyle as the comments from the author).

Discussion Questions

1. What was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira? – They tested the Spirit of God.
2. Did Ananias and Sapphira intend to test the Spirit of God? – I don't think so.
3. Could Ananias and Sapphira have kept part or all of the money? – Yes.
4. Did God hold Ananias and Sapphira accountable for making a personal decision to do what they did? – Yes.
5. How did God punish Ananias and Sapphira? – He put them to death.

THE WORK OF THE CHURCH (PART 1)

When I use the word “church” I am mostly referring to the Church of Christ as I am not familiar enough with all denominations to delve into their policies. I may reference other denominations where I am familiar with their policy, but the intent of this study is to examine what the Bible teaches on the subject, not necessarily what other denominations may teach.

As we get into this study, it is important to note that the church exists for three purposes:

- Preaching and teaching the gospel;
 - Edification of its members; and
 - Benevolent works.
- Let us take just a moment and look at these three purposes or “works” if you prefer. We are going to present a few verses that confirm each of these works. This will not be an all-inclusive list as that is not the intent of this work on benevolence.

EVANGELISM/PREACHING TO THE LOST

Of the three works listed above, evangelism and preaching to the lost would have to be the number one priority of the church. Without the continued evangelism to the lost the church would die.

Matthew 28:18-20

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been

given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.”

- There are several points in these two verses. First of all, Jesus tells them that He has been given all power in Heaven and on earth. Secondly, Jesus told them to go and teach all nations. This is the primary work of the church; to preach to the lost. Lastly, He told them to teach us to observe all things that He had commanded them. They were not free to change or adjust the message and neither are we.

Student’s Version – Page 14

Mark 16:15

“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.’”

- This is Mark’s version of what Jesus told them. They were to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. It was not to stop with just the apostles. They were not going to live forever. We have to pick up the mantle and run with it. And, we have to train our children so that they will be able to continue spreading the Word when we are gone.

Romans 10:14-15

“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings

of good things!”

- This is a very poignant statement. If there is no evangelism eventually there will be a group that has never heard the word. How can they hear without a preacher? Evangelism needs to have a succession plan. This is how the church has been around for over 2,000 years. The church is always just one generation away from ceasing to exist. We have to continue to send preachers into the field.

1 Corinthians 1:17-18

“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. Christ the Power and Wisdom of God For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

- This passage once again points out the importance of preaching.

2 Timothy 4:1-5

“I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

- This passage also talks about the importance of preaching but goes further by warning of the issues we discussed earlier in this study. It

warns of the pending danger of apostasy and the new hermeneutic. We are there now.

These passages clearly point to the importance of preaching for the continuation of the church.

Student's Version – Page 15

EDIFICATION OF ITS MEMBERS

Edification is a very important work of the church. Edification is sometimes confused with benevolence. To edify means to build up or strengthen. Edification is done at the individual level and the church level.

The individual and the church both need to be edified to continue, to grow, and to please God.

Edification at the Individual Level

Christians are required to edify each other and those in the world. The following passages address individual edification.

Romans 14:19

“Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.”

- This chapter is talking about Christians edifying weak brothers. There were several examples of where new Christians were trying to hold on to various parts of the Old Law. It was causing divisions among them. The individuals were not being edified, built up, by coming together. Paul was telling them to get on the same page so there would be harmony.

Romans 15:2

“Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.”

- We are to offer edification to our neighbors as well. But, we are to help him for his “good.” We are not to help them when they are doing things contrary to the scriptures. But we set the example, then encourage them to become Christians.

Romans 15:14

“Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.”

1 Corinthians 10:23-24

“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being.”

During the time of this writing the church was divided over the issue of eating meat offered to idols. Idol worship was rampant during this time.

Student’s Version – Page16

There were all sorts of pagan gods that the idolaters sacrificed animals to. The idolatrous priest would often take the sacrificed meat and sell it to the markets and keep the money. People that purchased this meat may or may not know that it was a piece of sacrificed meat. The early Christians were afraid that if they ate meat that was sacrificed to a pagan god that they would be sinning. Other Christians knew that meat offered to an idol did not have any type of sin attached to it. The meat was just meat. Paul was saying here that it did not violate his conscience to eat meat offered to idols, so it was okay if he did. Paul was saying that if his eating of meat offered to idols

offended anyone that he would not do so because it might create hard feeling which are contrary to edification. He did not want to be a stumbling block to someone else.

The second part of this thought is found in verse 24. The word “wealth” is not mentioned in the Greek text. It reads “let no man seek his own, but that which is of another.” The word is referring to everything that pertains to another’s comfort, usefulness, happiness, or salvation.

In other words, put the other man’s feelings in front of your own so you do not offend him, and he is edified by you.

1 Thessalonians 5:11

“Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.”

- In this passage the Thessalonians were being told to comfort one another. One of the greatest blessings we have is the gift of togetherness. When we are going through a difficult time it is good to know that we are not alone. People that are not Christians often have to go through their difficult times all alone.

Hebrews 10:24

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works...”

Jude 20

“But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit...”

- Another great gift we have is the power of prayer. We have a direct line to God through the Holy Spirit. Christ is our mediator. This should be a

great source of comfort for us.

Student's Version – Page 17

Edification at the Church Level

The church plays an important role in edification. Coming together to study the Bible keeps us on the same page. It keeps us from being tossed here and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine as described in Ephesians 4:14.

How Does the Church Edify?

It is hard to be edified when you stand alone. We need to feed on each other's passion, each other's knowledge, and each other's strength.

There is a reason that we meet on Sunday mornings. There is strength in numbers. Let us look at some of the reasons we meet:

- To worship God;
- To partake of the Lord's Supper;
- To teach and be taught;
- To sing songs; and
- To build one another up (edify)

To Worship God

We are commanded to assemble ourselves together. We are told in Matthew 18:20 that *"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."*

- This was a departure from the Jewish law. They believed that a number less than ten was not a church. This shows that if two or more meet to worship that Jesus will be in the midst of them. This is a comforting thought. Just knowing this should edify us.

Hebrews 10:25

"...not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

- We are commanded to attend services so that we can exhort/edify one another. Meeting together builds a bond. When you do not attend, it is like a piece of the puzzle is missing. The church is not complete.

To Partake of the Lord's Supper

Jesus instituted what we know as the Lord's Supper in Matthew 26:26-29:

Student's Version – Page 18

"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.'"

- Coming together on the first day of the week to remember the death of Jesus for us, and continuing to do so until He comes again, is a form of edification.

To Teach and Be Taught

There are a lot of reasons that we should attend worship studies. In Acts 2:42 we see that the early Christians devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

The early church was very zealous and desired to learn the truth.

1 Corinthians 14:12

“Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.”

- This thought begins in verse 11. It is speaking of the gift of speaking in tongues. One of the gifts that could be imparted during the early days of the church was the ability to speak to men in languages that were unknown to the speaker. He spoke as the spirit gave utterance in the language of the audience he was speaking to. Paul says that if the speaker is speaking in a tongue, and no one understands it, the group is not being edified. Worship services should be conducted in a manner that everyone can understand and participate in.

Paul went on to say in verse 26 to let all things be done for edification.

1 Corinthians 14:26

“How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.”

Paul told the church in Ephesus to “Edify itself in love.” Someone might be speaking in tongues. Someone else may be interpreting what is said. Someone else may be prophesying. The idea here is to do things decently and in order. People should not be talking at the same time and talking over each other. This just makes things confusing and no one will be getting anything out of it. One person should present his gift and sit down. The next person would present his gift and sit down so that the entire group is benefited (edified) by the experience.

- We all know how aggravating it is when we are trying to worship, maybe during the Lord’s Supper, and something is going on around us that distracts us. Maybe it is a child that is out of control or playing, maybe a baby is crying, or any number of things. That is what Paul is

talking about here. It is hard to be edified when there are too many things going on around us.

Student's Version – Page 19

Ephesians 4:11-16

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

- This passage talks about the establishment of the church. Before Jesus left He gave various gifts to people that would lead the church for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of ministry, and the edification of the body of Christ. As long as order is maintained in the church, and everyone does their part, the church will be edified and will grow.

The edification of the church is accomplished by the teaching and preaching of the word of God. When Christians are taught from the word of God what their responsibilities are, they are edified, or built up. When the entire church works together, and everyone does their part it is a pleasure to go to church and everyone is edified by being there. When you have people that are not doing their fair share, it does just the opposite. The body has to work together. Can you imagine if your left leg grew twice as fast as your right leg? Or, if you get up to move and one leg refuses to do its part? You

would not walk very well under either one of these conditions. Suppose you were hungry, and your hands refused to pick up a fork to feed you? The whole body would suffer. Eventually, the entire body might die. But when all of the parts work together, the brain tells you to get up and go to work to earn a living. The eyes show your body how to get there. Your legs take you there. The arms and hands do the work. The body working together earns a living and is able to support itself. It has food, clothing and shelter. The entire body is happy and grows in harmony. The same holds true for the church.

- People notice when you do not come to church. People notice when you come, and you are always late. People notice when something needs to be done and you never volunteer. People notice when there is a work-day and you don't show up. People notice when it is the same people that have to do everything. This can cause hard feelings even if they are never expressed. Every member should make it a point to be active and participate in the work of the church. There is something that we all can do. Don't be a coat-tail rider.

Hebrews 10:24

"And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works..."

Student's Version – Page 20

To Sing Songs

Singing is a great form of edification. Everyone loves to sing. Singing together just makes you feel good. When you sing, you build each other up. However, singing in church is actually commanded.

Colossians 3:16

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual

songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

Ephesians 5:18-19

"And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord..."

- So, we see from these passages that singing is a very important part of our worship service.

To Build One Another Up

Going to church and being around like-minded Christians is extremely edifying. Let us look at some passages that confirm this.

Romans 14:19

"Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another."

- The church in Rome was having some issues regarding eating meat and observing certain days. This was affecting their ability to get along. Paul is telling them to not dwell on these things but to work on finding common ground so they could edify each other.

Romans 15:2

"Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification."

- The word "neighbor" here is often used to describe the members of the

church. However, it is also used in the global term to mean those living around you. Our job is to please our neighbor for the saving of his soul. People around us take note of our actions and our meekness. We can cause them to want to be around us and be a part of the happiness we have.

Ephesians 4:12

"...for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ..."

- This scripture is talking about the gifts that were bestowed upon certain individuals. Those that were given these gifts were to edify the church. One cannot be edified unless they are in attendance.

Student's Version – Page 21

1 Thessalonians 5:11

"Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing."

- This passage is talking about the church staying together and staying vigilant until Christ returns. We are to take comfort in being around each other until we die or Christ returns.

We can see from these examples that going to church builds us up.

It is interesting to note that in all of these incidents of edification we have reviewed in the scriptures, none of them directly mention giving someone money or paying their bills.

We also do not see any examples of social activities taking place during

the acts of edification we reviewed.

We have to be very careful when we say that benevolence is an act of edification.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the primary work of the church? – Preaching and teaching the gospel, edification of its members, and benevolent works.
2. Would the church continue without evangelism? – No.
3. What does the word edification mean? – To build up or strengthen.
4. Do you think that edification is a part of benevolence? – Yes.
5. Is attending services a part of edification? – Yes.

Student's Version – Page 22

6. Is edification the work of the church or the individual? – Both are involved.
7. Is partaking of the Lord's supper a form of edification? – Yes.
8. Is singing a form of edification? – Yes.
9. Name some of the things that we do during services to promote edification. – Sing songs, pray, study the Bible, be taught a sermon, etc.

Additional Notes:

THE WORK OF THE CHURCH (PART 2)

BENEVOLENCE/BENEVOLENT WORKS

- There are several passages in the New Testament that address the idea of benevolence. We are only going to look at one right now and will look at the rest of them as we work our way through this study.

Romans 15:26

“For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.” (AJKV)

- We have now identified the three main functions of the church. This study is intended to thoroughly explore the subject of benevolence. This is probably the most in-depth study ever undertaken to try to fully understand when benevolence is appropriate, when it is not, and who is responsible for it.

The subject of church benevolence, and how the church should distribute or use its money, has long been a source of anguish and controversy in congregations all over the country. We all believe that we should be good stewards of God's money. A steward is a person who manages another's property or financial affairs. They actually do not own the property or money that they have charge over. This is important to remember as we examine this

subject.

The word “benevolence” is not mentioned in most versions of the Bible. The American Standard, The New King James, and others make no mention of the word. It is used once in the King James Version in 1 Corinthians 7:3. In this case it is being used to describe the marriage relationship. The Kings James reads:

“Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband.”

Other versions use the word “affection” instead of “benevolence.”

- As we get started, it is probably best to take a moment to look at the definition of the word ‘benevolence.’

Student’s Version – Page 24

BENEVOLENCE DEFINED

Merriam-Webster defines benevolence as:

1. Disposition to do good
2. a) An act of Kindness; b) A generous gift.

The King James Bible Dictionary defines benevolence and benevolent as:

benevolence

BENEV'OLENCE, n. L. benevolentia, of bene, well and volo, to will or wish. See Will.

1. The disposition to do good; good will; kind-ness; charitableness; the love, of mankind, accompanied with a desire to promote their happiness.

The benevolence of God is one of his moral attributes; that attribute which delights in the happiness of intelligent beings.

"God is love." 1 John 4.

2. An act of kindness; good done; charity given.
3. A species of contribution or tax illegally exacted by arbitrary kings of England.

benevolent

BENEV'OLENT, a. L. benevolens, of bene and volo.

Having a disposition to do good; possessing love to mankind, and a desire to promote their prosperity and happiness; kind.

While the Bible does not use the word “benevolence” throughout the inspired books, there are many passages that require us to act in ways that meet most of these definitions.

As we strive to live our Christian lives and comply with the scriptures on the subject of benevolence, we are faced with questions such as:

- What is the difference between individual and church responsibility?
- When and to whom does the church offer assistance?
- When is benevolence withheld from the Saints?

Student's Version – Page 25

- Is the church required to verify the legitimacy of the request?
- Does the church have any responsibility as to how the assistance is used?
- How much should the church offer as assistance?
- How does the church handle the distribution of support?
and
- What are the individual requirements to help the needy?

This study will address each of these questions and explore what the scriptures have to say regarding each of these questions.

This study is being written as an apologetic on the use of church funds for the needy. The word apologetic has taken on a new meaning from the way it was originally used. The original definition of apologetic simply means a “defense.

- This simply means that we intend to give a defense or state the reason why we as Christians do the things we do when it comes to the distribution of the Lord's money or our own money.

This issue seems to be more prevalent in the Church of Christ than it does anywhere else. Our society as a whole has become more liberal over time and our country has become more of a welfare state than it was in times past.

People have become more tolerant of those who are un-willing to support themselves when there are things that these individuals could be doing to make themselves a productive member of society.

Sometimes the Church of Christ is looked at negatively or gets an undeserved reputation as being hard hearted or un-caring because they do not hand out money to anyone and everyone that asks. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Church of Christ is one of the most compassionate and benevolent groups of people found anywhere. But, it must be under the right circumstances.

It should be noted that God never intended for benevolence to be used as a tool to bring people into Christ or to keep them faithful.

- You can pay people to come to church, but you can't make them participate in sincere worship. You can have five-star dining and you will fill the auditorium with people willing to listen to a preacher, or anyone else for that matter, for an hour knowing that they are going to be rewarded afterwards by a good meal. Jesus had this same problem after he fed the five thousand. The people flocked to Him and would not leave Him alone. He told them in John 6:26 that they followed Him not because they had seen the miracles, but because they had eaten the loaves and were filled.

Since this seems to be such a controversial subject, we will try to examine all aspects of the subject and see exactly what the scriptures have to say by looking at the passages listed in the New Testament that deal with benevolence and see what conclusions can be drawn. These scriptures will be

presented as accurately as possible. No liberties, distortions, or mis-quotes will be taken with the text.

It is important as you undertake this study that you have an open mind. You will not be able to objectively see both points of view if you enter into the study with a preconceived opinion.

Samuel G. Dawson wrote a booklet titled "Benevolence." In it he listed four possible attitudes one might have when studying the subject.[i]

1. "I know what I believe, and you are not teaching it."
2. "I know what I believe, and God's word must fit."
3. "How can I get around this teaching and still be pleasing to God?"
4. "We might have the attitude of Samuel in I Samuel 3:10, 'Speak; for thy servant heareth.'"

Note: The first three bullets list the wrong attitude for someone wishing to comply with the word of God. The fourth bullet exhibits the proper attitude that we should have as we study the scriptures.

- In the beginning there was only one church. Now there are so many denominations people ask, "how do I know which one is right"? Every denomination can be traced back to its roots. One only has to look at the date the denomination was established and who established it to find out which one is right or wrong. The Lord's Church was established on the day of Pentecost as detailed in Acts 2. Denominations were established either because the people did not want to live according to the scriptures, so they started their own religion, or, the denomination is classified as a cult.

Unfortunately, there is division and misunderstanding within the Churches of Christ on a variety of subjects. Splits occur within the church when one group feels differently than another group. Both sides want to prevail. Hurt feelings and a splintering of the group happens when the two sides refuse to put their personal feelings aside and take an honest unbiased look at what the scriptures say.

“Christians” tend to be compassionate, and, as a result, givers. There are many examples in the Bible of people doing good deeds for others whether the recipient was a Christian or not. Church benevolence is always directed at Christians that met certain qualifications.

We read in Galatians 6: 9-10:

“Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. 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.”

- This chapter was written to the Christian brethren to instruct them in their duty and love for one another. As the chapter proceeds, we see that the Christian is to always do good. Our first duty is to those of the household of faith, but that does not mean that we exclude others. The term “as we have opportunity” implies while our life lasts. God has blessed us beyond measure. He gives us chances to help others and demonstrate how a Godly person lives.

Then in Hebrews 13:16 we read:

“And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”

- The Jews were in a desperate condition at the time of this writing. The people were to entertain strangers that were both strangers to the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to them personally. We are not to tell someone to depart and be filled but not give them anything to eat. That is only lip service. When we give of our means, which is within our power, we sacrifice, or part with our own possessions. We are not greedy. God is pleased when we do such things.

The lines seem to get blurred between collective (church) and individual responsibilities.

- This cuts right to the heart of most misunderstandings. People seem to think that the church and the individual are considered equally when it comes to benevolence in the Bible. We will look at this in more detail shortly.

As you start to read this study you might ask, does it really matter? After all, we are just trying to do good and please and glorify God.

We are told in 2 Timothy 2:15 to rightly divide the word of truth. *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”*

This means when we come before God on the Day of Judgment we will be approved or rejected based on how we divided the word of truth.

We are warned in Galatians 1:6-9 not to pervert the gospel; *“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.”* We read in Proverbs 30:5-6, *“Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.”* Lastly, we read in Revelation 22:18-19, *“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”*

- This is where we have to be very careful in our interpretation of the

scriptures. The book of Revelation warns us that if we add to, or give other meaning, to what God originally intended, we subject ourselves to the plagues mentioned in the Bible. Namely, an eternity in Hell. If the Bible says that a certain group of sinners such as homosexuals, fornicators, and others will not go to Heaven, and you teach that God loves us all and accepts the very behavior condemned, you are elevating yourself above God. This is not acceptable. If you take away from what the scriptures say, or lessen their meaning, God will take you out of His book of life. It is very dangerous to make certain conjectures, interpretations, or assumptions when it comes to what might be considered a gray area. It is safer if you stick to the conservative side of the issues and not risk going out on a limb.

As you can see from these passages, we have a great responsibility to study the words that God gave us and ensure that we rightly divide them. We must strictly adhere to the commands and examples of the New Testament. Personal feelings or beliefs have no place in the interpretation of the scriptures.

We walk a fine line every day in our Christian lives as we strive to please God, be a good example, and lead others to Him. There are people that prey on Christians and are willing to take as much from them that they are willing to give. They know all of the right things to say to tug on your heart strings

Student's Version – Page 28

and portray themselves as victims that need your help. If you are not careful, you can be swindled to give more than you can really afford and to someone that is not really deserving of it. God does not expect you to be gullible.

We read in Deuteronomy 15:7-11:

“If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs. Beware lest there be a

wicked thought in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,' and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing, and he cry out to the Lord against you, and it become sin among you. You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand. For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.'"

- This is one of those situations where you need to know the background story. The Israelites had a law for the relief of poor debtors. There was a law under the Old Law that every seven years the ground rested from being tilled and servants were discharged from their services. In other words, you could not plant anything to allow the ground to recover. They did not have the fertilizers and means to replace the nutrients in the soil that we have today. God, in His infinite wisdom, declared that every seven years the land got to rest and regenerate its nutrients.

Since the people were not able to plant crops and sell their produce, there was another act of grace written into this law. That was that all debts owed were forgiven. If you had borrowed money and had not repaid it by the "year of rest," your debt was written off. This debt was completely written off. It wasn't just suspended for a year. It was a total forgiveness of the debt.

If you were able to repay the debt after the year of rest you should pay it as a matter of conscience, but if you did not your creditor could not recover it under the law.

It is also important to note that this law only applied to the Israelites. An alien could not take the benefit of the law. The Israelites were God's people and as such received the benefit of God's grace. Non-Israelites received no grace.

Because of this rule, the money lenders would sometimes be reluctant to lend money to people because it was almost the year of rest. If someone came to a rich man or a lender in the middle of the sixth year

and wanted to borrow money but could not repay the debt before the seventh year rolled around, they often would not lend the money to the poor because they knew they would not get repaid. When the seventh year rolled around, they would end up having to write off the debt.

This put the poor in a bad spot. They needed money, and no one would lend to them.

There seems to be certain limitations to the law:

1. The debtor was an Israelite;
2. He did not borrow for trade or purchase, but for the subsistence of his family, and that he could not repay it without reducing himself to poverty and having to flee to another country for relief; because this might be a temptation to revolt from God;
3. The law was not that the creditor should not get repaid if the debtor, or his family or friends could pay it; You should not go borrow money near the year of rest knowing that the debt would be forgiven, and you could just keep what you had borrowed for free.
4. But, if no one could repay the debt, he could not exact it by the legal process.

The reasons for this law were:

1. To put honor upon the sabbatical year. Because it is called the Lord's release. That was God's year for their land, as the weekly Sabbath was God's day for themselves, their servants, and cattle.
2. Just as the resting of the ground, and the release of debts, God would teach them to depend on His providence.
3. The year of release typified the grace of the gospel, in which is proclaimed the acceptable year of the Lord, and by which we obtain release of our debts, that is, the pardon of our sins, and we are taught to forgive injuries just as we hope to be forgiven of God.
4. It was to prevent any Israelite from falling into extreme poverty. God was looking out for His people.

Verse 8 tells us not only to stretch out our hand to the poor, but to open our hand wide and lend to him sufficiently, or liberally.

Verse 9 warns against refusing to lend because the year of release is at hand and the lender says to himself I will not lend what I am sure to lose. We see that the poor brother will cry to God about his plight and your refusal to lend to him, and it would be a great sin to the lender.

Verse 10 commands us to give cheerfully whatever we give in charity. It says our heart will not be grieved when we give because the Lord will bless us in our work.

When we have an occasion to charitable lending, if we cannot trust the borrower, we must trust God and lend to the person hoping for nothing again in this world but expecting that it will be recompensed in the resurrection of the just.

We read similar verses in the New Testament. Let's look at Luke 6:34-35.

Luke 6:34-35

"And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil."

Luke 14:14

"And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

Isaiah 58:10-11

*"If you extend your soul to the hungry And satisfy the afflicted soul,
Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, And your darkness shall*

Student's Version – Page 29

be as the noon-day. The Lord will guide you continually, And satisfy your soul in drought, And strengthen your bones; You shall be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail."

- Verse 11 of Deuteronomy 15 says that the poor will never cease to be in the land. And then in verse 12, the people were commanded to freely open their hand to their brother, to the needy and the poor in their land.

Matthew 26:6-11:

"And when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table. But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, 'Why this waste? For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor.' But when Jesus was aware of it, He said to them, 'Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always.'"

Jesus was not being insensitive toward the poor. He recognized that human nature being what it is, that there will always be poor people due to a wide range of reasons from laziness, drunkenness, bad luck, etc. No economic system can survive in a world where money is given to those who do not work for it. Human nature being what it is causes those that do work to question why they are working so hard for so little when those who are not working are getting handouts nearly equivalent to their own. As a result, they stop working and go on the hand out system. As more and more do this, the system spirals out of control and eventually collapses.

- Jesus took this time to defend the woman for doing a well-meaning act of love for Him. He said she did it for His burial. He went on to say in the following verses that if that expensive ointment were to be poured on a dead body, as was their custom, no one would have criticized her for it.

The woman wanted to do something for Jesus that He would enjoy while He was still with them.

There will always be opportunity for us to do good things for others. That doesn't mean that we should begrudge someone when they do something nice for another person when maybe we would not have done so the same way.

Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 3: 8-15:

“nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If any-one will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busy-bodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. And if anyone does not

Student’s Version – Page 30

obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”

- Unfortunately, the church is not immune from having people that do not live up to the gospel. In this case, there were some of the Thessalonians who were walking disorderly and not following the teachings of the apostles. Paul called out the ones that were idle, or not working. It seems that these “idle” people were also busybodies. A busybody is not someone that is constantly working. A busybody is someone that involves themselves, or meddles, in the affairs of others. This is usually unwelcomed and uninvited. Often the object of the busybody is unaware that they are being spoken about by the busybody. These people can be very damaging because they make

assumptions that are untrue in a lot of cases.

You might ask, what has a busybody got to do with benevolence? A lot of busybodies become so because they have too much time on their hands. If they spent more time working, they would have less time for gossiping. We have all heard the old saying "idle hands are the Devil's workshop."

The Bible does not have anything good to say about busybodies. In fact, it is quite the opposite.

These passages, 2 Thessalonians 3:11, 1 Timothy 5:13-15, and 1 Peter 4:15 all talk about these people. They can be very destructive to the unity of the church.

1 Timothy 5:13-15

"And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproach-fully. For some have already turned aside after Satan."

- Paul was concerned about the young widows in the church. He wanted the young widows to remarry, bear children, and take care of the house. In others words, stay busy. He equates the young widows having too much time on their hands as an opportunity for Satan to take hold of them. He said specifically in verse 15 that some of the young widows had already turned aside after Satan.

1 Peter 4:15

"But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters."

- These are pretty poignant words for members of the church. It is interesting that busybodies are grouped into the same company with thieves and murderers. People that refuse to work and live off of the good nature of Christians are in danger of being labeled as a thief. One definition of a thief is one that steals stealthily or secretly, or one that commits larceny.

Whether it is the church or the individual doing the giving, we have to determine the sincerity of the need and set boundaries.

- Having read this far, let us take a look at some discussion questions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does the word apologetic mean? – A defense of a subject.
2. What is your definition of benevolence? – Helping those in need and being kind to others.
3. How many times is the word “benevolence” mentioned in the Bible? – Once, but in the King James Version.
4. Please list those scriptures. – 1 Corinthians 7:3

Student's Version – Page 31

5. In what context is the word “benevolence” used in the Bible? – It is talking about the marriage relationship.
6. Before beginning this study, do you believe there is difference between the responsibilities of the church as a group and the individual? – Yes.
7. Do you believe that people inside the church have become tolerant of those who cannot or will not work? – Yes, and that is a shame.
8. Do you believe that Christians tend to be very compassionate? – Yes.

9. Do you believe that benevolence is a useful tool to get non-Christians to attend worship services where they will hear the gospel? – No, or at least not for the right reasons.
10. Based on this short section, do you feel that it is important to follow the scriptures to the letter, or do you feel that we have some latitude where there is not a “thou shall” or “thou shall not”? – We must strictly adhere to the scriptures.
11. Can you provide scriptures to support your position? – Galatians 1:6-9, Proverbs 30:5-6, Revelation 22:18-19.

Student's Version – Page 32

12. What does Galatians 6:9 say should happen to anyone that teaches any other gospel than what you have received? – He will be accursed.
13. What does Proverbs 30: 5-6 say will happen to us if we add to God's words? – You will be rebuked and found a liar.
14. What does Revelation 22:18 say will happen to one that adds to God's word? – It will be added to him the plagues that are written in this book.
15. What does Revelation 22:19 say will happen to one that takes away from God's word? – God will take away his part from the book of life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.
16. What does it mean for God to take away our part from the Book of Life? – We know that if we remain faithful and follow the Bible that we will have a home in Heaven. However, if we do not follow the Bible, or even worse, try to change it to meet our expectations, God will take our names out of His book of life.
17. Will we be lost if we change, alter, or fail to follow God's word? – Yes.
18. Do you believe that people often approach the church for assistance when they are undeserving of help? This question applies to both Christians and non-Christians. – Yes, unfortunately this happens.

Student's Version – Page 33

19. Do you believe that Jesus was aware of this? – Yes.
20. What was Paul's feeling about people that would not work? – They should not eat.
21. Complete the verse from Deuteronomy 15:7. "If there is a poor man with you, one of your brethren, 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;"
22. How many times is the word "brother used in verses 7-11? – 4
23. How many times do these verses say to help someone that is not a brother? – It never mentions helping someone that is not a brother.
24. What did Jesus say about the poor in Matthew 26:11? – He said that they would have the poor with them always, but they would not have Him always.
25. What kind of example did Paul and the apostles set for the people in 2 Thessalonians 3:8-10? – He did not take anyone's bread for free. He worked hard to support himself while he was with them.

Additional Notes:

This is a sample of the material contained in
Benevolence: An Apologetic on the Use of Church Funds for the Needy
Student Manual
Instructor's Manual
by Wade Holt

To order single copies, visit:
store.gospelarmory.com/product/benevolence-student/
store.gospelarmory.com/product/benevolence-instructor/

To place a bulk order (10 or more copies)
and receive a discount, visit:
www.gospelarmory.com/bulk/

Thank you!

