

God's Plan of Salvation:

1. Hear - Romans 10:17
2. Believe - Mark 16:16
3. Repent - Acts 2:38
4. Confess - Romans 10:10
5. Be baptized - Acts 22:16
6. Live faithfully - Revelation 2:10

Announcements:

Sick: Mrs. Calvert, Seth Calvert, Mrs. Douglas, Mr. Douglas' mother, Mr. and Mrs. Hadley, Mrs. Kelly Hall, Ms. Harris, Mrs. Elizabeth Jackson, Ms. Kim (Ashley Law's mother), Lamar Mathis, Mr. and Mrs. Pete Newsome, Mrs. Siota, Mr. Winns.

If you would be interested in any of the following ways to study the Bible, feel free to let us know:

- Home Bible Study - We will come into your home or other place you feel comfortable and study the Bible with you. Bible questions are welcome in these studies and we will seek to give a Bible answer.
- Correspondence courses - We will be glad to mail you a correspondence lesson that you can fill out and mail back to us and we will send you the next lesson.
- Call us with your Bible question - #503-707-6014.
- Visit our website:
www.oakgrovechurchofchristjenningsflorida.com
- Come and visit - We always strive to have good, practical Bible instruction at each of our assemblies.

Oak Grove Church of Christ Bulletin

2922 NW 76th Terrace, Jennings, FL 32053

February 2, 2020

Was Paul Acting Like a Missionary Society, Sponsoring Church, etc.?

By Derek Long

In talking with others about the need for local churches to carry out their work as independent, autonomous congregations someone may point out the actions of Paul and claim he shows it is lawful for congregations to pool their money to meet a need (like benevolence). Does Paul's example grant us approval to use things like a missionary society, a sponsoring church, a cooperative program, a disaster relief fund, etc. funded by several different local congregations to carry out evangelistic or benevolent work? Let's turn our attention to various Bible verses to answer this question.

The Bible plan is for each local congregation to have a plurality of elders which oversee the work of the congregation they are members of. Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5 speak about the need for a plurality of elders in each church. 1 Peter 5:1-4 tells the elders to "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you." Their oversight is therefore limited to the congregation which they are a part of. To find an organization larger than local congregations with elders, deacons, and saints (Philippians 1:1) through which the church is to carry out its work in the New Testament will be a futile search. No such organization is described in the New Testament because no such organization existed in the early church. If the Scripture is silent regarding such organizations, it is clear God has not given His authority for such.

Paul as an evangelist was supported by individual congregations for the work of preaching the gospel. 1 Corinthians 9:14 says, "Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel," granting authority for preachers to be supported for preaching the gospel. Paul was occasionally supported by one congregation alone. The church at Philippi financially supported Paul at times by providing all the financial support he received (Philippians 4:14-18). The church at Philippi

did not send aid through some missionary society, sponsoring church, or some other cooperative program to support Paul's efforts to teach the gospel. At other times Paul would be supported in preaching the gospel by several local churches (2 Corinthians 11:8). Nothing is said about these churches forming some sort of collective organization through which to cooperate in the spreading of the gospel. They were cooperating but were doing so through concurrent rather than collective action. They did not form a centralized organization through which to carry out their work of helping spread the gospel throughout the world. It is amazing to notice the amount of success the early church had in spreading the gospel without the existence of some centralized organization through which churches carried out their evangelistic work (Colossians 1:23). Paul's example as an evangelist receiving support from individual local churches does not authorize churches to form a collective to carry out their evangelistic work.

On two separate occasions Paul would carry aid from a congregation or congregations to a church or churches with needy saints. Does his actions on these occasions authorize us to have a centralized group through which local church can carry out benevolence? Acts 11:25-30 tells us about the first of these occasions. Paul and Barnabas were working with the church at Antioch for a year. A prophet named Agabus foretells a coming famine and the brethren at Antioch determine to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. On this occasion one congregation is sending aid to possibly several congregations within a region. Therefore, we do not find here a pooling of funds from several different congregations. In addition, Paul and Barnabas do not create some human institution through which churches should send their disaster relief money. Paul and Barnabas were members of the church at Antioch who were selected to take the money to the elders of the churches in Judea. After they "fulfilled their ministry" (Acts 12:25), they returned back to Antioch to continue to work with the group there until they were "sent out by the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13:1-4) to teach people in various places. The second time Paul was involved in supplying benevolent need to certain churches with needy saints is spoken about in several passages (Acts 24:17; Romans 15:25-27; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9). Paul by his apostolic authority commanded churches to take up a collection on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). Today, we do not have living apostles to provide us with such instructions but we ought to follow the instructions written by them which are the commandments of the Lord (1 Corinthians 14:37). These churches would send money to help needy saints in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-27). The money would have to be transported from these various congregations to the church at Jerusalem. The method employed was to have each individual congregation select someone to be responsible

for carrying their gift to Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:3-4). Paul was not the individual who would solely be carrying all this money to Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:16-22). Some important statements which do not fit with the structure practiced by those who send benevolence through some centralized cooperative program are: 1. 1 Corinthians 16:3 - "I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem." In the centralized cooperative programs I am familiar with all the money is pooled and dispersed as the centralized oversight sees fit. Corinth's contribution would be carried along with collections from several other churches to Jerusalem but their money remains distinct. Corinth also did not give up oversight of their money to a centralized group of people. Corinth would select a person to serve as a messenger or courier to get the money from Corinth to Jerusalem. 2. 2 Corinthians 8:23 - "They are messengers of the churches." Instead of having a centralized board, etc. to oversee these funds, each local congregation had selected an individual/s to carry their funds to Jerusalem. Churches today may select a person to carry funds to a congregation with needy members in another place. Churches today may use some sort of courier service (Western Union, bank transfers, etc.) to get money from them to another congregation with needy members. However, there is no authority in the Bible to form a centralized organization to funnel benevolent aid from many congregations to congregations in need. A final observation: Disaster relief funds, etc. exist whether a need presently exists or not. These early churches were not sending funds for disaster relief when no disaster had occurred. It is important for us to "Hold fast the pattern of sound words" (2 Timothy 1:13) which includes how churches should carry out the work God has given them to accomplish.