

Limited Benevolence as a Work of the Local Church

By Paul R. Blake

I. Limitations On Benevolence In Local Churches Imposed By The Scriptures:

- A. It is restricted to members of the Lord's church (must be a faithful Christian)
- B. It is restricted to those members who lack the necessities of living (must be genuine need)
- C. It is restricted to those members who do not have the resources to supply their own needs (must be a good reason)

II. THE WORK OF A SOUND CHURCH: LIMITED BENEVOLENCE

- A. Acts 2:44-45
- B. Acts 4:34-35
- C. Acts 6:1-3
- D. Acts 11:27-30
- E. Rom. 15:25-27
- F. 1Cor. 16:1-3
- G. 2Cor. 8:3-7
- H. 2Cor. 9:1,7-8,12
- I. 1Tim. 5:4-5,9-11,16

III. RECIPIENTS OF LIMITED BENEVOLENCE IN A LOCAL CHURCH

- A. It is restricted to members of the Lord's church (must be a faithful Christian)
 - 1. All texts speak of "believers, saints, disciples, brethren, their widows, and those among them"
 - 2. Therefore, one who receives aid from a local church must be recognized as a faithful Christian, a member of the church
 - 3. Only qualified widows may be "taken into the number" of those who receive ongoing support
 - 4. All other Christians in need may be helped in a crisis, but they may not be taken into the number of those receiving ongoing support
- B. It is restricted to those members who lack the necessities of living (must be genuine need)
 - 1. The scriptures indicate that the needs were the necessities of living -- food, clothing, shelter -- and therefore aid rendered from the local church would be limited to these specific needs.
 - 2. There is no justification offered in the word that covers poverty due to poor budget planning, over extending oneself in debt, help with a failing business
 - 3. The New Testament speaks of genuine needs -- "daily distribution (of food), a great famine, the poor, really a widow"
- C. It is restricted to those members who do not have the resources to supply their own needs (must be a good reason)
 - 1. Famine, widowhood, and the poverty associated with them are conditions that restrict the ability of one to provide the basic needs of the body

2. There is a difference between one who has resources but does not want to part with them, and one who has insufficient resources, health, and ability to supply her own needs.

IV. WHO MAY NOT RECEIVE AID FROM A LOCAL CHURCH?

- A. One who is not a member of the Lord's Church
- B. One who has adequate food, clothing, and shelter, but who may lack some of the amenities considered important in contemporary times
- C. One who has resources -- family, friends, fellow disciples, savings, properties, etc. -- that can be used to supply his needs

V. LIMITED BENEVOLENCE AS A WORK OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

- A. The Church was built to accomplish the work of the Lord, that is to teach the lost (evangelism) and to build up the saved (edification). These are the church's primary functions
- B. Limited benevolence is subsidiary to the above. It does not supercede or replace the purpose for which the church was built.
- C. When a local church renders aid to one who does not meet the scriptural criteria of a needy saint, the church has misused the offerings given to conduct the work of the Lord's church.
- D. When a local church allows its efforts and expenditures for limited benevolence to exceed its efforts and expenditures for evangelism and edification, the church has lost its focus on its God given work.
- E. Both of the above have the potential to start a local church down the path to institutionalism.