

The Work of the Church – Benevolence

The Bible teaches that God designed and established the church (Matthew 16:18). He did not leave the church without purpose or direction. Instead, God gave the church a specific work to accomplish. That work can generally be described in three areas: evangelism, edification, and benevolence.

Let's consider the church's work of benevolence. Some have the idea that the church's responsibility in benevolence is to provide relief for all of humanity. However, such a task would quickly exhaust the resources of any local congregation. Rather than leaving us to determine the scope of the church's benevolent work for ourselves, God has given us a pattern in His Word.

God has instructed individuals to work and provide for their own physical needs (Genesis 3:19), and the New Testament teaches that a person has a responsibility to provide for his own household (1 Timothy 5:8). However, circumstances sometimes arise that prevent individuals from being able to meet their physical needs. When this occurs, God expects individual Christians to be compassionate and willing to help others (James 1:27; Galatians 6:10).

It is important, however, to recognize the distinction between the responsibilities of individual Christians and the responsibilities of the local church. What an individual Christian is authorized to do with his own resources does not automatically authorize the church to do the same from its treasury. We can see this distinction clearly in 1 Timothy 5:9–16. Some widows had family members who could provide for them. In those cases, God instructed the family to accept that responsibility so that the church would “not be burdened” (1 Timothy 5:16). Other widows were truly in need, having no family to care for them. When the qualifications given by God were met, the church could provide for their needs. This passage demonstrates that God placed limits upon the church's benevolent responsibilities even toward a widow that is a Christian.

Repeatedly in the New Testament, we find local churches providing assistance when needs arose among the saints. In Acts 4:32–35, the church at Jerusalem cared for needy members so that “there was not anyone among them who lacked.” In Acts 6:1–6, as “the number of the disciples was multiplying,” certain widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. The church appointed qualified men to oversee this important work.

Later, when a famine created hardship, the disciples determined to send relief “to the brethren dwelling in Judea” (Acts 11:27–30). Still later, Christians in Jerusalem found themselves in great need. Churches in Macedonia and Achaia responded by sending assistance for “the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem” (Romans 15:26). The churches of Galatia were also instructed to participate in the collection for the saints (1 Corinthians 16:1–3).

The pattern is clear. When physical needs arose among God's people, churches provided the necessary relief.

- by Josh McCord

Dividing Over Modesty — Really?

We have heard of churches dividing—of all things—over the subject of modesty. Think about that for a moment. Churches—congregations of God's people—being divided because some want to loosen the standards of dress that Christians have traditionally recognized as modest.

Those causing such division are not the brethren who are encouraging people to cover their bodies. They are not the ones who have changed. The problem comes when some insist that standards of modesty should be abandoned and that exposing portions of the body identified in Scripture with nakedness should now be acceptable.

The Bible speaks clearly about this. Isaiah 47:2-3 speaks of uncovering the leg and uncovering the thigh, and then says, “thy nakedness shall be uncovered.” God clearly connects the exposure of the thigh with nakedness. When God gave instructions concerning the clothing of the priests, He commanded garments “to cover their nakedness; from the loins even unto the thighs they shall reach” (Ex. 28:42). This is certainly worth considering when determining how much of the body should be covered.

The torso should not be overlooked either. In the Garden of Eden we read, “And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed” (Gen. 2:25). But after sin entered the world, Adam and Eve recognized their nakedness and made inadequate coverings for themselves (Gen.

3:7). God subsequently made them “coats of skins, and clothed them” (Gen. 3:21). The Hebrew word for ‘coat’ is kethoneth, which is the same basic word used elsewhere in the Old Testament for a tunic. For example, Joseph’s “coat of many colours” in Genesis 37:3 is kethoneth. Clearly, the Bible does not treat the exposure of the body as an insignificant matter.

Scripture consistently presents nakedness as the improper exposure of the body (Gen. 3:7, 10; Ex. 28:42; Isa. 20:4; 47:2-3). We should not allow modern fashions to redefine what God’s Word teaches. Paul instructed Christians to an even stricter standard – not simply a minimal covering of nakedness. Women are to dress “in modest apparel” (1 Tim. 2:9). The principle applies to every Christian: our clothing should reflect modesty, propriety, and godliness.

We must not dismiss these biblical principles because they have become unpopular. Instead, we must follow the Bible. If God’s Word teaches modesty, then we should practice modesty. If Scripture identifies the uncovering of the thigh and torso with nakedness, we should take that seriously. If the Lord expects His people to dress modestly, changing fashions do not change His expectations.

The subject of modesty should never become a reason for division. There is something terribly wrong when brethren are willing to divide a church because they are determined to expose more of their bodies than God’s Word allows. We should never be ashamed to stand for modesty. And we should never be so determined to be immodest that we are willing to divide the Lord’s church over it. Think!

- by Greg Gwin