What God has NOT Joined Together (11):

THE CHURCH AND GENERAL BENEVOLENCE



Introduction



- Continuing our 2026 theme, 2 weeks ago we discussed how God has NOT joined together the church and entertainment.
- In that lesson we briefly discussed the “social gospel” movement with its origins and purpose.
- Today, continuing along that line we want to notice how God has NOT joined together general benevolence as a work of the church.
- While entertainment was an indirect result of the movement, seeing the church as a general benevolent organization is a DIRECT result of that movement.

Some Preliminary observations



What I am NOT questioning in this lesson:

- That there is a need for general benevolence.
- That Christians can and SHOULD be benevolent according to their ability (e.g., **Ephesians 4:28, James 1:27, Matthew 25:31-46,** etc.)
- That benevolence IS a work for the church
- The sincerity or good intentions of a congregation (or individuals) who engage in these works.

Some Preliminary observations



What I am NOT questioning in this lesson:

- That there is a need for general benevolence
- That C… …ding to the … **Matt…**
- That …
- The sincerity or good intentions of a congregation (or individuals) who engage in these works.

The question: According to God's word, IS general benevolence a work of the church?

Some Preliminary observations



What is “general benevolence”?

- *Benevolence*: To perform kind, charitable acts. A gift given out of generosity. (American Heritage Dictionary)
- *General benevolence:* Extending benevolence to address/alleviate societal needs to unbelievers from the treasury of the church, either regularly or in times of distress (i.e., disasters).

The Church and Benevolence in Scripture



- Benevolence is an act of fellowship – **2 Corinthians 8:4.** Paul praises the Macedonians, who in poverty wanted to help brethren in Jerusalem.
- This implies a spiritual aspect associated with their giving to fellow saints.

The Church and Benevolence in Scripture



- There is a pattern in scripture for benevolent responsibilities of the church
- **Acts 2:44-45, 4:32-37, 6:1-7** – **locally**, as the church in Jerusalem was in its infancy.
- They helped their own. "*Now the multitude of those who believed… Nor was there anyone among them who lacked*…" (**4:32-34**)
- **Acts 6:1-3** – neglected widows. 7 men appointed from among them to relieve THEIR needs.

The Church and Benevolence in Scripture



- There is a pattern in scripture for benevolent responsibilities of the church
- **Acts 11:27-30** – **helping Judean brethren** -
- Agabus prophecies of a famine. The brethren in Antioch (Syria) determine to send relief to the brethren in Judea.
- They send it by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.
- They give it to the elders of the various churches of Judea (consider that elders are limited in their work – **Acts 20:17, 28, 1 Peter 5:1-3**)

The Church and Benevolence in Scripture



- There is a pattern in scripture for benevolent responsibilities of the church
- **<u>Later, a concern for the church in Jerusalem</u>.**
  As Paul is concluding his 3rd missionary journey, he is collecting funds from churches/brethren to help needy saints in Jerusalem.
- **Romans 15:25-26** – he mentions this and commends brethren in Macedonia and Achaia (Corinth)
- **1 Corinthians 16:1-4** – set something aside (authority for a treasury); whomever you choose
- **2 Corinthians 8-9** – a reminder of their commitment; commending brethren in Macedonia, giving cheerfully and liberally (**9:6-8**)

The Church and Benevolence in Scripture



- There is a pattern in scripture for benevolent responsibilities of the church. <u>Some observations about the pattern.</u>
- **It was always directed toward needy saints!**
- **1 Timoty 5:3-16** – Paul describes who is "qualified" to be supported from the church treasury.
  - The church is NOT a 'pocketbook' for anyone who has a need (or says they do).
  - CLEARLY, this is a faithful Christian.
- Also, let us not ignore potential abuses (Younger widows cf. **5:11-16**, those who refuse to work – **2 Thessalonians 3:10-11, etc.**), because they become idle, etc.
- Proceeds are diverted from "widows indeed"

The Church and Benevolence in Scripture



- There is a pattern in scripture for benevolent responsibilities of the church. <u>Some observations about the pattern.</u>
- **It becomes a work of the church ONLY after all other means are exhausted.**

  1 Timothy 5:16 – "If any believing man (woman)… do not let the church be burdened"

  - Are brethren taking care of their family?
  - Are we individually generous when we see a need?

  James 2:14-17, 1 John 3:17-18

The Church and Benevolence in Scripture



- There is a pattern in scripture for benevolent responsibilities of the church. Some observations about the pattern.
- **It becomes a work of the church ONLY after all other means are exhausted.**
- NOTE: I KNOW that brethren here are willing to help from their own resources rather than turning to the treasury
- Also, while not perfect, our government and society has made provisions for care of the needy and underserved in our communities. (We pay taxes and can donate to charities – **cf. Ephesians 4:28**). This is a legal means to consider before turning to the church treasury.

The Church and Benevolence in Scripture



- There is a pattern in scripture for benevolent responsibilities of the church. <u>Some observations about the pattern.</u>
- **It is always temporary by description**
  - IF the need is there, help with it.
  - But do NOT make that the purpose of the church
  - There have been churches that “sponsored” a “benevolent work” and it becomes a permanent fixture and part of that congregation’s identity. That is NOT the intent of the church and benevolence.

The Church and Benevolence in Scripture



- There is a pattern in scripture for benevolent responsibilities of the church. <u>Some observations about the pattern.</u>
- **It is accomplished while congregations maintain their autonomy**

  - No benevolent organizations were created in the NT.

  - No "centralized" fund raisers for funds. Only the collection of the saints on Sunday

  - **1 Corinthians 16:3** – they chose their own messenger

The Church and Benevolence in Scripture



- There is a pattern in scripture for benevolent responsibilities of the church. <u>Some observations about the pattern.</u>
- **Help was sent directly to where the need was**

  - No “middle man” such as an benevolent organization or “sponsoring church”.

  - Again, it was accomplished with all congregations involved maintaining their autonomy.

The Church and Benevolence in Scripture



- There is a pattern in scripture for benevolent responsibilities of the church. Some observations about the pattern.
- **It was NEVER used as a means to introduce the gospel**
  - Sometimes the justification today.
  - Consider **John 6:26-27** – Jesus noted why the audience was there. What will it take to keep them?
  - **Acts 6:2-4** – note that the apostles made a distinction between their work (evangelizing and edifying spiritually) and the acts of benevolence.
- Benevolence is about helping saints who are hindered because of physical needs and all other resources have been exhausted.

The Church and Benevolence in Scripture



- There is a pattern in scripture for benevolent responsibilities of the church. <u>Some observations about the pattern.</u>
- **There is a distinction between what the individual can do and the church can do.**
  - Some justify general benevolence by declaring that if individuals can do it, so can the church
- But it does not work that way. We cannot shift our responsibilities to the church. **1 Timothy 5:16, cf. Acts 5:4 –** a clear distinction.

Concluding thoughts



- God has given us a pattern for the church and benevolence.
- He has NOT joined together general benevolence with the work of the church.
- Individual Christians have much more liberty in these matters. And we OUGHT to be known for generosity and caring for others.
- BUT His pattern for the church must be respected. And it DOES WORK.

DO YOU SEE HIS PATTERN AS IMPORTANT?

