

We hope you *will* take the time to *closely* study the content of pages 2 and 3 — even though the layout is somewhat tedious. For *that* we apologize but it seemed to be the only way to include sufficient information to discuss this subject.

While you might rightfully be saying “does it really matter?” — or — “isn’t that splitting hairs?” — we should keep in mind that as the New Testament Church, it is our intention to follow the Scriptures in *all* things. *This* is then, one of those things that can be answered *only* by the Scriptures. Might it then be possible that, it is precisely *because of these* kinds of debates that God saw fit to have each congregation of His Church autonomous — under the guidance of its *own* Elders. As we stated, there are persuasive arguments on both sides of this question. It seems to *us* however, that *either* belief can be misused and abused. Either can be carried to an extreme that seems quite senseless. For example: There *are* Biblical restrictions that apply to benevolence of *any* sort. I Timothy 5 restricts aiding widows — even believers — who fail to meet an *extensive* list of criteria (v. 9-10). II Thess. 3:6-15 clearly excludes *lazy* brethren from receiving aid. All too often, those who have what *some* might call a “generous” attitude toward benevolence lack Biblical wisdom when it comes to not only using discretion in some cases but of also blatantly violating those verses mentioned above. Encouraging and enabling idleness is not a Scriptural virtue (I Thess. 5:14). Giving to *every* person who asks for help — whether done by individual Christians *or* by the church *as a collective group*, is not the kind of benevolence the Bible tells Christians to practice. On the other hand, it certainly would seem to be a violation of numerous *other* Biblical principles to refuse to take a dollar from the *collective* treasury to feed a starving non-believer standing in the front yard of the church building. *All* benevolence must be tempered with prudence, common sense and most of all, Biblical wisdom.

So the Mission of the Church is Evangelism, Edification and Benevolence — period!! The mission is *not entertaining* believers *or* non-believers. Nor is the mission political in nature — though the church may be an influence for responsible government. The mission is also *not* a social one — i.e. fulfilling the role of a “cruise director” for its members and/or young people. The mission is also not material (having the most architecturally stunning, and comfortable buildings in the city). The mission is not secular in its scope — even though the church *may* alter social and economic conditions by its presence and its teachings. The mission of the church *is* spiritual in nature. We read in Luke 19:10 that Jesus said His reason for coming to earth was “*to seek and to save that which was lost.*” He passed that mission on to us with the Great Commission. Just as in times past (Lev. 10:1-2 and II Sam. 6:7), God will *not* accept substitutes or disobedience. We have a mission — let’s get on with it!

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# DILIGENCE

“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11

A ministry of Dennis and Sherri Owens

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## The Mission Of The Church — Continued

We stated in the previous issue that the mission is three-fold — 1) Evangelism, 2) Edification and 3) Benevolence. We noted that the “church” is *individual* believers who gather together from time to time *as a collective group*, which is also referred to as the “church.” In that previous issue we asked this question —

“So ... when we speak of the “mission of the church” are we referring to the “church” as *individual* believers — or — are we referring to the “church” as the *collective group* — as a whole? Is there a *difference*? ”

We determined that there are Bible verses that indicate Evangelism and Edification are indeed the responsibility of both *individual* believers as well as the “church” as a *collective group* of believers. So that question above is pointless concerning *those* parts of the mission — but is Benevolence different? Some say yes and some say no — and those differing answers have divided brethren for many years.

We’ll begin this discussion by stating that *absolutely no one questions* the fact that *every* Christian has a responsibility to be benevolent toward those who are in need — whether they be believers *or* non-believers. There are numerous Scriptures we can look to that verify benevolence is a core value of Christianity. Perhaps the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) is most often quoted as a “proof text” for that belief. So again, we emphasize that *no one is questioning* that benevolence is an *important* Christian responsibility! *Neither* does anyone question the fact that the church *as a collective group*, should *always* be ready to help truly needy *Christians* within their own congregations. What is questioned and debated however is whether the Scriptures assign the mission of benevolence toward *non-believers* to the church *as a collective group* of believers — or do the Scriptures assign the mission of benevolence toward *non-believers* to the church *only as individual believers — not* to the church *as a collective group*.

So we’re going to discuss that question in this issue. Here’s the catch. *You’re* going to have to decide the answer for *yourself*. We’ll present the differing views and it will be up to you to decide whether you accept Belief # One or Belief # Two. There are persuasive arguments on *both* sides. *You* decide which is correct according to the Word. First of all — *get your Bible!* There are *far* too many Scriptures to include all of them in our text but the study will have no meaning whatsoever *unless* you *read* each Scripture referenced. So begin by opening your Bible and reading the Scriptures listed in the *top center box* of the inside pages — *then* — carefully consider each argument as to its validity concerning the Scriptures. *continued on pages 2 and 3*

## Scriptural Argument For Accepting Belief # One

This belief maintains that benevolence to needy saints is a Scriptural responsibility of individual Christians and the local congregation. It maintains that benevolence to non-believers is a Scriptural responsibility of individuals only — not of the collective congregation.

**Group 1 Verses** — All refer to benevolence *among* believers.

- Acts 2:44-45 — An example of benevolence *within* a local congregation. Who had everything in common? — the *believers*. Who did they give to after selling their belongings? Those who had need *within* the group of believers. The *believers* had everything in common — not *non-believers*.
- Acts 4:32-35 — Verse 32 states the benevolence refers *only* to *believers*. With whom did they share? Believers! Who is the “*them*” and “*every man*” in verses 34 & 35? Rules of grammar and context indicate it would be the *believers* mentioned in verse 32.
- I Tim. 5:3-16 — verses 4, 5, and 10 indicate the widows on the “list” are to be *believers* — *not* widows *outside* of the faith.

**Group 2 Verses** — benevolence from one *congregation* to another needy *congregation*

- All 4 Scriptures — *All specifically* mention “*Saints*,” “*Brethren*,” etc.. None others.

**Group 3 Verses** — close scrutiny shows these verses *all* refer to *individuals* showing benevolence — *not* the church as a *collective* group. (For space reasons, we’ve selected only one. You may want to study the others in this group this same way).

- Gal. 6:1-10 — “*Brethren, even if a man* [an individual, not a church] *is caught in any trespass, you* [an individual, not a church] *who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted.* <sup>2</sup>*Bear one another’s burdens,* [individuals, not the church] *and thus fulfill the law of Christ.* <sup>3</sup>*For if anyone* [an individual, not a church] *thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.* <sup>4</sup>*But let each one* [an individual, not a church] *examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone* [an individual, not a church], *and not in regard to another* [an individual, not a church]. <sup>5</sup>*For each one* [an individual, not a church] *shall bear his own load.* <sup>6</sup>*And let the one* [an individual member, not a church] *who is taught the word share all good things with him* [an individual teacher, not a church] *who teaches.* <sup>7</sup>*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man* [an individual not a church] *sows, this he will also reap.* <sup>8</sup>*For the one* [an individual, not a church] *who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one* [an individual, not a church] *who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life.* <sup>9</sup>*And let us* [each individual, not a church] *not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we* [each individual, not a church] *do not grow weary.* <sup>10</sup>*So then, [as previously established] while we* [each individual, not a church] *have opportunity, let us* [each individual, not a church] *do good to all men* [Christians and non-Christians], *and especially to those who are of the household of the faith* [especially Christians].”

Some Biblical Texts That Deal With Benevolence		
Group 1 Verses	Group 2 Verses	Group 3 Verses
1) Acts 2:44-45	1) Acts 11:27-30	1) Gal. 6:10
2) Acts 4:32-35	2) Rom. 15:25-28	2) Jas. 1:27
3) Acts 6:1-6	3) I Cor. 16:1-2	3) Matt. 25
4) I Tim. 5:3-16	4) II Cor. 8 and 9	4) Heb. 13:2
5) II Thess. 3:6-12		5) I John 4:17
		6) Luke 10:30-37

continued

## Scriptural Argument For Accepting Belief # Two

This belief maintains that benevolence to needy saints is a Scriptural responsibility of individual Christians and the local congregation. It maintains that benevolence to non-believers is a Scriptural responsibility of individuals — as well as of the collective congregation.

Concerning this belief there is less need to look at individual Scriptures since it hinges on the fact that the

“church” — as a *collective* group of believers *can not be separated* from the “church” as *individual* believers. Benevolence to believers as well as non-believers is therefore a responsibility of the *collective* church as much as it is a responsibility of the *individuals* who make up that *collective* church. It is in effect, Christian love set in motion and therefore should not be restricted to a work by *individuals* only. This belief maintains that the words “we” and “us” in Galatians 6:10 *does* refer to the *collective* group of believers (the local congregation) since the church *is* the *individual* believers and is therefore *no different* from the *collective group*. That particular verse (among many others) then, authorizes the *collective* church to engage in works of benevolence (including food pantries, soup kitchens, etc.) to *all* men (believers *and* non-believers alike).

Another specific example of this would be Matt. 5:43-47. Assuming that the Scriptures do *not* differentiate between the *collective* church and the church as *individual* believers, those verses would then substantiate that since even God bestows benevolent favors on the unjust as well as the just, the church — not just the *individual* believers but also as the *collective* group — should bestow benevolence on *all* men — believers as well as non-believers.

This belief maintains that Belief #1 is ridiculous since those who hold to it, have no problem taking money out of the *collective* treasury to feed fertilizer to their church lawn but will *not* take money out of the *collective* treasury to feed hungry non-believers.

→ **Summary For Belief # One** — Without exception, the Scriptures establish a pattern of benevolence to *believers only* by the church *as a collective group*

- Acts 2:44 and 4:32 — *believers shared with believers*
- Acts 6:1-6 — dispute was over *believing widows*
- Acts 11 — relief *for the brethren*
- I Tim. 5:3-16 — *faithful widows*
- I Cor. 16:1 — collection *for the saints*
- Rom. 15:25 — minister *to the saints*
- II Cor. 8 and 9 — support *of the saints*
- II Thess. 3:6-12 — no support for *lazy believers*

This belief maintains that Belief # 2 is in error because rightly dividing the Word of Truth *means* recognizing that some verses are addressed to *individual* believers and some are addressed to the *collective group* — context matters.