

CONGREGATIONAL FELLOWSHIP

Rom 15:25-27

INTRODUCTION:

- A. New Testament churches are made up of people who are "called unto fellowship" of the Son of God (1Cor 1:9), and are in communion with God 1Jhn 1:3
- B. People who are in fellowship with God have been freed from sin, and are partakers of the divine nature Rom 6:17,18; 2Pet 1:4
- C. The redeemed in local areas are local churches, and are complete units functioning under Christ as their head Phil 1:1
- D. Local churches, functioned by divine arrangement Acts 14:23, acting independent of other churches, their action being CONCURRENT and independent of all other congregations, doing the same work under the same Lord with the same objectives.

DISCUSSION:

I. THE BASIS FOR CONGREGATIONAL FELLOWSHIP

- A. Each New Testament church is composed of the same kind of people 1Cor 1:13 Possesses the same faith 2Pet 1:1; Is instructed in the same things with the same message 1Cor 4:17; 7:17; 16:1; and are therefore to do the same work.
- B. There is only one head of the church and he is "head over all things to it" Eph 1:22,23; Col 1:18,24
- C. Each local church sustains an equal relationship to the work enjoined upon it Edification (perfecting), Benevolence (ministry), Evangelism (edifying, building up) Eph 4:12
 - 1. One congregation is just as much the "pillar and ground of the truth" as another 1Tim 3:15
 - 2. Each has become a pillar because of its relationship to Christ which was brought about by the members being born into the family Acts 2:38-47
 - 3. Each congregation (like each disciple Rom 14:4) stands or falls before the Son of God Rev 1:20; 2:5 (Not that we are going to be judged as congregations in the final judgment but that each congregation is responsible for its own work and not that of another congregation)

II. FELLOWSHIP IN EDIFICATION

- A. The lesson on "Fellowship and 'church discipline'" is essentially one on edification. That is building up and strengthening the body so that it can function in the manner that God intended it to function.
- B. Most, if not all congregations recognize this as a local responsibility and there is not many problems related to congregational cooperation in regard to this aspect of the work of the church.

- C. We have not seen many congregations trying to help out in the edification of sister congregations. There has been no centralizing of funds to form an edification society except in some proposals of some colleges for the church to send them support and let them turn out qualified elders, deacons and preachers. I read an article concerning college suggestions to do this.
- D. I do not have a problem with brethren utilizing the places of higher learning to advance their knowledge and ability. I do not have a problem with brethren operating and supporting (on an individual basis) schools where the Bible is taught as part of the curriculum. But I do have a problem with schools trying to assume the responsibilities of congregations and urging churches to send donations to them so they can do the work of the church

III. FELLOWSHIP IN EVANGELISM

- A. There is no command for, no inference in evidence, and no record of one church sending money to another church for the receiving church to preach the gospel.
 - 1. Subordination of many churches to one through joint action by way of a sponsoring church destroys equality
 - 2. If a sponsoring church could do the evangelistic work for other churches it could do all the work for all the church, then where would the fellowship be?
 - 3. Fellowship in evangelism is not destroyed because societies and human arrangements are rejected
 - 4. Congregational evangelism is ordered by the Lord like all other spiritual matters! Let's look at the pattern
- B. Paul went to Corinth Acts 18:1 to preach Christ 1Cor 1:23. In preaching Christ he preached the gospel 1Cor 1:17 the testimony of God 1Cor 2:1
 - 1. The people heard, believed and were baptized Acts 18:8, which is what the Lord ordered in Mk 16:15,16
 - 2. At first Philippi was the only church that communicated (koinoneo) Phil 4:15 with Paul in this work. Later Paul "robbed other churches, taking wages of them to do ye service." 2Cor 11:8
 - 3. The fellowship of churches is seen in the CONCURRENT action of this case. The support for Paul came from various churches, being brought by their own messengers (each congregation approving its own 1Cor 16:3) directly to the evangelist Phil 2:25; 4:18
- C. The church in Thessalonica became a pattern on gospel preaching for all who believed in Macedonia and Achaia 1Thess 1:7,8
 - 1. When the churches of Macedonia and Achaia imitated the pattern they were like it in work

2. The "church of the Thessalonians" was evangelistic because Christ commanded it; the churches of Macedonia and Achaia which imitated Thessalonica were also evangelistic. They did their work independently of each other, but were all doing the same things, thus had fellowship in evangelism, that is, they each had a share in this work of evangelism.
3. Churches unaware of the existence of some other church, nevertheless, has fellowship with it as they each act under Christ, carrying out his will that they be the pillar and support of the truth 1Tim 3:15
- D. Each church being equally related to the charge of Jesus to preach the gospel is having fellowship with all other churches of Christ as they discharge this commission

IV. FELLOWSHIP IN BENEVOLENCE

- A. The New Testament abounds with cases of congregational benevolence
 1. Distributing (koinonountes) to the necessity of the saints Rom 12:13
 2. "For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution (kononian) for the poor saints which were at Jerusalem" Rom 15:26
 3. Ministering to the saints is fellowship 2Cor 8:4
- B. The church is obligated to communicate to poor saints who are indigent 1Tim 5:16
 1. The church may not fellowship the relative of a poor saint who refuses to "relieve" his relatives that are in need.
 2. A congregation might have more needy within it than resources to meet its needs. The churches of Judea needed help in a time of a dearth (drought) and Antioch "sent relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea: which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul." Acts 11:27-30
 3. No church in the New Testament begged other churches for money, that the begging church might send this money on to other churches for benevolence. The churches which received help were churches needing that help
 4. The Jerusalem church illustrates this: The Jerusalem church was responsible for its own, but persecution and famine brought about a condition of destitute saints within that church and the need was greater than the ability of that church to supply. Therefore, other churches supplied this want 2Cor 8:13,14
 5. It appears that no benevolent program was permanent, because the need was not permanent.

6. Philip was one of those individuals "over" the benevolent business in the Jerusalem church. But in a little while he was preaching in Samaria and Azotus Acts 8:5,40 then in Caesarea Acts 21:8
7. Note chart on use of the treasury.

V. NO CONGREGATION IN NEW TESTAMENT FELLOWSHIPED ERROR

- A. The only fellowship that involved one congregation sending funds to another congregation was in benevolence and never was it sent to another institution and then sent to the needy recipient
- B. In Evangelism each congregation sent directly to the preacher (evangelist) in his field of labor. Each congregation decided who they would help and how much. This work was never done through a sponsoring church or any human institution
- C. In the field of edification (teaching, making saints mature) there is no evidence of any funds being sent anywhere, no "fellowship" among congregations. Each congregation did its own work of edifying itself in love Eph 4:16
- D. There was never any "fellowship" in any way between the Lord's church and any other religious group in the accomplishing of the work of the church. In fact Paul said they were to be separate 2Cor 6:14-18

CONCLUSION:

- A. All fellowship of the church of Christ was and is spiritual participation - -- that is --- it was and still is a function of the will of Christ
- B. Churches of Christ:
 1. Have the power to fellowship or not fellowship an individual Acts 9:26,27
 2. Have the right to withdraw from a disorderly member Rom 16:17,18; 2Thess 3:6,14,15; 1Cor 5:4,5
 3. Are independent of each other; they have no organic ties. Elders are purely local 1Pet 5:1-4 and cannot exercise authority over another church. This independency of churches eliminates power to "withdraw" from other churches
 4. The fellowship that churches have with each other is simply, that they are participating in the same work directed by the same authority as each has the ability and opportunity. It is the same as each Christian has with every other Christian even though they are not members of the same congregation.

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