

An Approved Church Takes Care of Its Own

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In Matthew 6:31-33 we read of a promise that Jesus made. *"Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."* The promise was that *"all these things will be added to you"*, referring to what you eat, drink and wear, or more generically, the needs of your life.

This promise was not without conditions. The condition Jesus set was that a person was to seek the kingdom; more specifically, that the kingdom would be first priority in life. In other words, this promise was only to those who were disciples of Jesus Christ.

This promise might seem problematic at first. How would it be fulfilled? But the New Testament reveals its fulfillment through the church in the book of Acts. It begins in Acts 2:44-45, where we read of the church taking care of members who had needs. In Acts 4:34-35 we read how those needs were taken care of by a collection laid at the "feet of the apostles". Then in Acts 6:1 we read about a daily distribution of food to the widows of the church. Finally, in Acts 11:28-29 we see how collections were taken up in churches to assist other churches with these needs.

The book of Acts reveals that it is the church that fulfills Jesus' promise. Each church saw to the needs of members by a collection that was made for these needs. Those needs included famines, poverty, and the long term needs of widows.

Outside of the book of Acts there is a pattern found for churches and the promise of Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 we are told that the church is to take up this collection on the first day of every week. Then in 2 Corinthians 9 we are told that the collection is given by members based on what they desire to contribute; there is no expectation or required amount (such as a tithe).

One of the purposes of the local church is the *"ministry to the saints"* (2 Corinthians 9:1). It refers to the fulfillment of the promise Jesus made to disciples that their physical needs would be met. An approved church does this work by the pattern found in the New Testament; it follows the means and method of collection and the people to whom the promise applies.

An Approved Collection

What are the means and method of collection? From the scriptures above we see that this collection is taken only on the first day of the week. We see that it is a collection from the church members only, and that it is determined personally without measure by the church. Being on the first day of the week infers that it becomes a part of our collective worship together.

In contrast, an unapproved collection could be one that is taken from the public at large (consider the website "give now" buttons as a current means of doing that). An unapproved collection

might be one taken at just any assembly. It is unapproved if it is a collection raised by business enterprise. It is an unapproved collection if it is a tithe.

An Approved Ministry

The purpose of the works is to take care of the needs of the Saints. First, only widows are to receive a “stipend” or “allowance” from the church. There are very specific qualifications for widows found in 1 Timothy 5:9-10 for them to receive this: *A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man, having a reputation for good works; and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, and if she has devoted herself to every good work.*

To those who have an emergency need, such as those in Acts 2 who were without a home or means to stay in Jerusalem, or those in Jerusalem in Acts 11 affected by famine, this collection can be used as a means to help alleviate the emergency (one time) need. But there are still qualifications that must be met. In 2 Thessalonians 3:10-11 Paul declared that “if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either”. This tells us that Christians who are not walking aright cannot be aided by this collection.

What does an unapproved ministry look like? First, it is one where a local church sees its purpose as helping all people. It fails to discern the saints from the lost, and thereby fails to fulfill the conditions of the promise of Jesus. It may too fail at discerning the qualified recipients. Finally, it may fail by not helping when it should.

But what about the needy person who is lost, or the semi-needy brother? We are told in Galatians 6:10 that a personal work of individual Christians is to “do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith”. Helping those who are not part of the promise of Jesus is a work all individual Christians have been given.

Approved churches see purpose in ministry. That purpose is to fulfill God’s promise to Christians: *“For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God”* (2 Corinthians 9:12). Approved churches see and follow the pattern of this ministry, understanding the dangers mishandling money brings, and understanding the personal work of saints.