

Limited Benevolence as a Work of the Local Church

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- Limitations on benevolence in local churches imposed by the scriptures:
 - It is restricted to members of the Lord's church (must be a faithful Christian)
 - It is restricted to those members who lack the necessities of living (must be genuine need)
 - It is restricted to those members who do not have the resources to supply their own needs (must be a good reason)

The Work Of A Sound Church

- Limited Benevolence
 - Acts 2:44-45 - “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.”
 - Acts 4:34-35 - “Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.”

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- Acts 6:1-3 - “Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.”
- Acts 11:27-30 - “Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. 29 Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. 30 This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.”

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- Rom. 15:25-27 - *“But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. 26 For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. 27 It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.”*
- 1Cor. 16:1-3 - *“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: 2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. 3 And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.”*

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- 2Cor. 8:3-7 - *“For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, 4 imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. 5 And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God. 6 So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. 7 But as you abound in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us--see that you abound in this grace also.”*

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- 2Cor. 9:1,7-8,12 - “Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you. 7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. 12 For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God.”

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- *1Tim. 5:4-5,9-11,16 - “But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God. 5 Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. 9 Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, 10 well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work. 11 But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, 16 If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.”*

Recipients of Limited Benevolence in a Local Church

- It is restricted to members of the Lord's church (must be a faithful Christian)
 - All texts speak of “believers, saints, disciples, brethren, their widows, and those among them”
 - Therefore, one who receives aid from a local church must be recognized as a faithful Christian, a member of the church
 - Only qualified widows may be “taken into the number” of those who receive ongoing support
 - All other Christians in need may be helped in a crisis, but they may not be taken into the number of those receiving ongoing support

Recipients of Limited Benevolence in a Local Church

- It is restricted to those members who lack the necessities of living (must be genuine need)
 - The scriptures indicate that the needs were the necessities of living -- food, clothing, shelter -- and therefore aid rendered from the local church would be limited to these specific needs.
 - There is no justification offered in the word that covers poverty due to poor budget planning, over extending oneself in debt, help with a failing business
 - The New Testament speaks of genuine needs -- “daily distribution (of food), a great famine, the poor, really a widow”

Recipients of Limited Benevolence in a Local Church

- It is restricted to those members who do not have the resources to supply their own needs (must be a good reason)
 - Famine, widowhood, and the poverty associated with them are conditions that restrict the ability of one to provide the basic needs of the body
 - There is a difference between one who has resources but does not want to part with them, and one who has insufficient resources, health, and ability to supply her own needs.

Who May Not Receive Aid From A Local Church?

- One who is not a member of the Lord's Church
- One who has adequate food, clothing, and shelter, but who may lack some of the amenities considered important in contemporary times
- One who has resources -- family, friends, fellow disciples, savings, properties, etc. -- that can be used to supply his needs

Limited Benevolence as a Work of the Local Church

- The Church was built to accomplish the work of the Lord, that is to teach the lost (evangelism) and to build up the saved (edification). These are the church's primary functions
- Limited benevolence is subsidiary to the above. It does not supercede or replace the purpose for which the church was built.

Limited Benevolence as a Work of the Local Church

- When a local church renders aid to one who does not meet the scriptural criteria of a needy saint, the church has misused the offerings given to conduct the work of the Lord's church.
- When a local church allows its efforts and expenditures for limited benevolence to exceed its efforts and expenditures for evangelism and edification, the church has lost its focus on its God given work.
- Both of the above have the potential to start a local church down the path to institutionalism.