

GLAD TIDINGS

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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The new testament church's outreach program

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When people think of churches' outreach programs today, they envision soup kitchens, food pantries, staffed counselors, K-12 schools and children's day care centers. People take pride in their church reaching out through these programs and endeavoring to make a difference in this cruel and evil world.

However, when we look in the New Testament, we do not see churches funding these separate programs, even as the churches were infallibly guided by Jesus through His apostles. The offerings collected in the churches were used to support preachers who preached the saving gospel of Christ (Phil. 4:15-16, 2 Cor. 11:8), and were used to help poor and needy Christians (Acts 2:44-45, 4:34-35, I Cor. 16:1-3, etc.). But what about the poor who were not yet Christians? How did the churches reach out in their communities and make a difference in the first century?

The New Testament church's "outreach program" involves EVERY MEMBER. While each member gave as he or she prospered on the first day of the

week to help needy Christians, these same individuals were personally involved in helping the needy around them who were not yet Christians. The Christian reaches out with such help for he or she knows that as one has "opportunity" the Christian is to "do good unto all men" (Gal. 6:10). The helping hand of the Christian is reaching out to help the widow and orphans in their need, for the true believer knows that such reaching out is as essential to professing a pure and undefiled religion as keeping oneself unspotted from the world (James 1:27).

Every Christian is to be involved in showing hospitality to strangers (Heb. 13:2, I Tim. 5:10, I Pet. 4:9). Being kind and helpful to those whom we first meet has a powerful effect for good. In the Lord's church there is no need for a group of "official greeters", for every member is to make sure every visitor feels welcomed. No visitor should visit our church and not be warmly spoken to. No visitor should ever experience a "miffed" look when they seek to sit on the pew where we usually sit. All Christians are to take an interest in showing love and hospi-

ality to strangers in our midst.

Every member is to be involved in "holding forth the word of life" (Phil. 4:16). Extending the gospel to a lost world while at the same time offering them the example of a pure and godly life, Christians are "as lights in the world". Every true disciple becomes an effective outreach of light and salt to a world in desperate need of guidance and a conduit through which the God of heaven is glorified (Matt. 5:14-16).

Often, man designed "outreach programs" cry out for volunteers to run them. Church leaders are constantly trying to find ways to get individuals involved. The Lord's "outreach program" accomplishes God's designed work, while at the same time involves every member. At the judgment, it will not matter what "outreach programs" your church sponsored, but if you were personally involved in the Lord's authorized "outreach program". Did YOU held the needy (Matt. 25:31-46)? Did YOU engage in hospitality to strangers? Were YOU faithful to teach others the gospel (2 Tim. 2:2)?