

Glad Tidings

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

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Fellowship In The Gospel

(Jerry Fite)

Fellowship in the gospel of Christ occurs in more than one way in the New Testament. When Paul wrote of Epaphras and his work in preaching the grace of God, the apostle described him as a “*fellow-servant*” and “*faithful minister of Christ*” (Col. 1:7). Epaphroditus was a “*fellow-worker*” for he ministered to Paul on behalf of the brethren in Philippi when Paul was in prison for preaching the gospel of Christ (Phil. 2:25, 1:12-13). Gaius was commended for helping those preachers who took nothing from the Gentiles while he made provisions for them as they went on their way preaching the Gospel. Such work is characterized as being “*fellow-workers for the truth*” (3 John 5-8).

Individuals participated with or had fellowship in the gospel of Christ, by preaching it along the side of other preachers, or offering monetary or physical support to those who were doing the preaching.

Local churches also had fellowship in the gospel of Christ as they supported preachers. At one time in Paul’s ministry he received funds from one church: the church in Philippi. Paul writes,

“And ye yourselves also know, ye Philippians, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church had fellowship with me in the matter of giving and receiving, but ye only” (Phil. 4:15). Sharing the funds collected in the local church with Paul, the church in Philippi had “*fellowship in furtherance of the gospel*” (Philippians 1:5).

We know Paul also received wages from other churches when preaching in Corinth, no doubt to help avoid a hindrance in the furthering of the gospel among the Gentiles there (cf. I Cor. 9:12). When Paul writes, “*I robbed other churches, taking wages of them that I might minister unto you*” (2 Cor. 11:8), he is responding to an apparent charge that he was wrong when he would not take money from the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:7). In his mind he took from, or despoiled other churches in that he rendered the paid-for-service unto the Corinthians, not directly unto the other churches.

However, by each church giving wages to the preacher as he spreads the good news of Christ, a plurality of churches has fellowship with the preacher in the Gospel.

One popular method of having fellowship in the Gospel is through the “sponsoring church” arrangement. This is where churches send funds to a single congregation who, under the oversight of the elders in that church, determine the preachers who will be supported.

In 2 Corinthians 11:8, there is no indication of a single church sending a sustaining wage to Paul, for he took such from a plurality of churches.

Some argue that the “giving and receiving” taking place in Philippi authorizes other churches “giving” to a church and that church “receiving” the funds to then support the preaching. To the contrary, the fellowship in the gospel is between the church in Philippi “giving”, and Paul “receiving”. If Philippians 4:15-16 is a “sponsoring church” arrangement, only the sponsoring church is having fellowship in the gospel, not the other so called “giving churches”. I do not think that those giving money to a “sponsoring church” today believe that only the sending church is having fellowship in the Gospel, yet Paul says this is the case. Is your church having fellowship in the Gospel Scripturally?