

# The Brown Street Beacon

*"...Shine out among them like beacon lights,*

*holding out to them the Word of Life" (Phil 2:15-16)*



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## Church Cooperation In Evangelism

**T**here is a common misconception in our society that says the end justifies the means. This concept has been glorified over the years by the popular movie "Robin Hood." Robin Hood is a story in which a man and his companions steal from the rich and give to the poor. The message is that it is okay to steal as long as you do something worthy with the stolen money. After all, the end (poor people getting relief) justifies the means (stealing).

This concept has found its way into the church. We see an example of it in the way some churches cooperate in the area of evangelism. Some local churches combine their funds, usually placing the charge of the funds under one church known as a *sponsoring church*, in order to do some great work of evangelism. Programs such as the "Herald of Truth" radio program in times past and, a little more recently, the "One Nation Under God" campaign, organized by the Sycamore church of Christ in Tennessee, demonstrate unscriptural cooperation between local churches. In both of these situations churches endeavor to do a work greater than their finances allow them to do. To solve the financial problem churches pool their money and *cooperate* in the area of spreading the gospel. Someone says, "What could possibly be wrong with something that will end with someone hearing the gospel?" It is wrong because it involves unscriptural cooperation between local churches, and the end does not justify the means.

Why is the arrangement described above wrong? First, it violates church autonomy. In the first century, each local church was autonomous, i.e., self-ruling and self-governing. They had elders to oversee the work and feed the flock. These elders, while having delegated authority, had limits to their oversight. They were to be concerned with only the local congregation that appointed them as elders. Peter said, "*Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof . . .*" (1 Peter 5:2). When an eldership gets involved in overseeing all of, or even a part of, the work of another local church, autonomy is lost. This is exactly what happens when a sponsoring church collects money from other local churches in order to accomplish an evangelistic effort which it cannot do itself without assistance. This is unscriptural and therefore wrong, regardless of the good that may be accomplished. Remember, the end does not justify the means. Local churches should be involved in evangelism, but it should do only what it is capable of doing by itself.

Second, there is no pattern for local churches sending money to other churches to accomplish work in spreading the gospel. We must do all things according to the pattern (Hebrews 8:5). In the New Testament each local church did its own work in the area of evangelism. Churches sometimes sent money directly to preachers to spread the gospel. *“Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God”* (Philippians 4:15-18). Notice, there is no sponsoring church here. There is no violation of autonomy in this arrangement. There is simply one church supporting a man so that he might preach the gospel. There is not one passage in the New Testament that finds one church sending to another church for the purpose of evangelism. Since there is no passage and no pattern for such an arrangement, it is unauthorized and therefore sinful.

Let's spread the gospel! Evangelism is a part of the work of the church (Ephesians 4:11, 12). However, let's not abandon the word of God in our zeal to spread the word. Let's abide in the doctrine of Christ and practice only those things that are authorized by the New Testament (Colossians 3:17). Let's follow the pattern!

*Don*