

The Christian's Responsibility to the Local Church (4)

March 1995

We receive fund-raising magazines and brochures in the mail nearly every week. Companies peddle almost everything to denominational churches which, in turn, peddle it to the public for a profit. Did the Lord create a for-profit business? Did He intend for the unsaved to subsidize the work entrusted to His spiritual kingdom?

The new testament speaks consistently on this subject. The work that was expressly charged to the local church was funded by free-will contributions of the members.

In the days of the earliest converts, some of whom were in Jerusalem for Pentecost and unprepared for an extended stay, *"all who believed ... sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need"* (Ac 2:44-45; cf. Ac 4:34-35). This was not a church activity but a private, individual transaction. As Peter asks Ananias, *"And after it was sold, was it not in your own control?"* (Ac 5:4). Any portion of those proceeds deemed fitting by the seller was placed in the common "treasury" for distribution (Ac 4:35).

God was very specific on the matter of gifts and sacrifices under the old covenant. But under the new covenant, no arbitrary percentages are given. The guidelines regarding the recipients are *"as anyone had need"* (Ac 4:35) and to supply what is lacking (2 Cor 8:13-15). The criteria for the giver involves first giving oneself to the Lord (2 Cor 8:5) and then giving *"as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver"* (2 Cor 9:7).

God wants cheerful, generous givers who are willing to sacrifice whatever may be considered an abundance in order to fund the obligations placed upon the local church. This is the standard, not a certain percentage which, when met, relieves one of any further obligation. (As a side point, this will have the natural effect of limiting the scope of the work of a local church.)

Still, many Christians wonder, "Am I giving enough?" This worry will not be put to rest by percentages but by purposeful giving. Good leadership in a local church will provide members with clear, legitimate reasons to give. If this is not satisfying, perhaps direct support of a preacher or helping of others in need will quiet a troubled conscience. But one's first responsibility is to support the work discharged by the local church.