

THE SPONSORING CHURCH ARRANGEMENT

INTRODUCTION:

1. In the late 1940's brethren were not only discussing the college and orphan home issues, they were also facing the issue of the "sponsoring church" arrangement.

2. The "sponsoring church" arrangement is where one local church sponsors a work that all churches have an equal obligation to do (or are "equally related to") and then calls upon other churches to send funds to enable the "sponsoring church" to do the work.

(1) This arrangement is a cooperative effort on the part of many churches of Christ to enable them to jointly act in doing some work that is general in nature as to interest and responsibility.

(2) The participating churches centralize their resources in and delegate their responsibilities to the "sponsoring church".

(3) This concept is one which tries to activate the church universal in a central organization by having many churches pool their funds under one eldership.

(4) The work done through this arrangement is not being done by a local church because the "sponsoring church" is larger than a local church. The elders have become "ecumenical" rather than local.

(5) The elders of a "sponsoring church" have become "brotherhood elders", functioning in an office which the New Testament knows nothing about.

1. In the New Testament elders are LOCAL (I Pet. 5:2; Acts 20:28).

2. The work of elders in the New Testament is assigned, not assumed (I Pet. 5: 1 – 3)

a. The work of "sponsoring church" elders is assumed.

b. There is no New Testament authority for an assumed work.

c. Therefore, in the creation of the sponsoring church you have a functioning unit unknown to the New Testament.

(6) The “sponsoring church” is a camouflaged missionary society.

(7) The purpose of the sponsoring church arrangement is to activate the church universal through a central agency, just like the missionary society.

(8) The sponsoring church destroys the equality of the churches and elders (II Cor. 8:14).

1. Participating churches and elders subordinate themselves to the “sponsoring church” elders.

I. IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS CENTURY THE “SPONSORING CHURCH” ARRANGEMENT BECAME A MAJOR ISSUE IN CHURCHES OF CHRIST.

1. The three major “sponsoring churches” that came into existence after World War II were:

(1) The Broadway church of Christ in Lubbock, Texas became a “sponsoring church” to evangelize Germany.

(2) The Union Avenue church of Christ in Memphis, Tennessee became a “sponsoring church” to evangelize Japan.

(3) The Highland Avenue church of Christ in Abilene, Texas became a “sponsoring church” for the “*Herald of Truth*”, a national radio broadcast.

1. The first “*Herald of Truth*” radio program was aired by affiliates of the American Broadcasting Company on February 10, 1952. James W. Nichols preached the first sermon.

2. The “*Herald of Truth*” program began on television in 1954.

3. In 1963, 317 radio stations and 65 television stations were carrying the program.

4. In May 1960 they claimed that almost one in ten congregations were helping to support the program.

II. ARGUMENTS MADE TO SHOW WHAT WAS WRONG WITH THE “SPONSORING CHURCH”.

1. It was pointed out that the “sponsoring church” arrangement entailed a form of congregational cooperation for which there is no Bible authority.

(1) The Bible nowhere authorizes many churches sending funds to one congregation to enable it to carry on a work of evangelism. There is no precept, inference, or example for this type of cooperation.

1. The examples we have in the New Testament of congregational cooperation was concurrent effort, not joint action.

a. One church helped other churches in times of emergency by contributing to their needs (Acts 11: 27 – 30).

i. Antioch “sent relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea” Acts 11: 29.

ii. The money was raised by the disciples in Antioch (Acts 11:29).

iii. Paul and Barnabas were chosen as messengers to take this fund to the “*brethren which dwelt in Judaea*” (Acts 11:30).

iv. The money was delivered into the hands of the elders (Acts 11: 30).

(1) There were several churches in Judaea (Gal. 1:22).

b. Congregations of Galatia, Macedonia, and Corinth cooperated (acted concurrently) in meeting the needs of the Jerusalem church (Rom. 15: 25 – 28; I Cor. 16: 1 – 4; II Cor. 8 and 9).

i. Each church raised its own money by each of its members giving their proportionate part on the first day of the week (I Cor. 16: 1, 2).

ii. Each church chose its own messenger (I Cor. 16:3), and sent the money directly to the Jerusalem church.

iii. Jerusalem, who was “in want” (need), received help from churches who were able to give (II Cor. 8:14).

(1) This bounty supplied the need, relieved the distress.

(2) Jerusalem now had equality with the other churches (it was free from want).

2. You can see from these examples that there is a specific pattern for congregational cooperation in the New Testament.

(1) Churches helped each other in time of emergency by contributing directly to the church or churches which needed relief (Rom. 15:26; I Cor. 16: 1, 2; Acts 11: 27 – 30) because they were unable to do their own work.

(2) A church with “power” (ability, II Cor. 8:3) gave to a church in want in order to produce mutual freedom from want (or as Paul put it, “equality” II Cor. 8: 13, 14).

(3) The only time we read about one church sending funds to another church, it was to relieve the physical “want” of members of that church to which the funds were sent.

(4) There is no authority to send to a church to do a general work.

3. In the New Testament there is no authority for a sponsoring church in the support of preachers; preachers were supported directly.

(1) Churches of Macedonia sent wages directly to Paul as he preached in Corinth (II Cor. 11: 7 – 9).

(2) The church at Philippi sent support directly to Paul (Phil. 1: 4, 5; 4: 14 – 18).

III. LET US NOW LOOK AT SOME THINGS THAT LOCAL CHURCHES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT DID NOT DO.

1. No church delegated its responsibility to another church either in caring for the needy or preaching the gospel.

2. No congregation became a centralized agency through which other churches cooperated in doing any work.

3. No eldership of any congregation exercised any control over the members, the discipline, the resources, or the activity of any other congregation.

4. No church had pre-eminence over another church.

5. In the New Testament there is no function of elders outside the church of which they are elders.

6. There is no organization of any kind in the New Testament for churches to work through.

7. No local church became an agent for the church universal to operate through.

IV. BASIC FACTS WE MUST REMEMBER:

1. In the New Testament NO church of Christ had pre-eminence over another.

2. In the New Testament there was no coordination of local churches to function through one eldership or human institution.

3. In the New Testament there is NO PRESSURE of one church on another, or others.

4. The only force in the religion of Christ is the force of being right.

5. In the New Testament there is no function of elders outside the church of which they are elders.

6. In the New Testament no action of one church was binding on another church (even in discipline); otherwise there would be an authority other than the scriptures infallible.

7. No elders of one church can be the voice of the churches of Christ – elders of one church can only speak for themselves.

8. No eldership has authority to operate a human institution (the church is without authority to do so).

9. No eldership can function for the elders of another church.

10. No eldership of a sponsoring church is mentioned in the New Testament.

11. There is no organization of any kind or character in the New Testament for inter-church general work.

12. There is simply no authority for the church “universal” to operate through the church local or a human institution.

(These “Basic Facts” were taken from Foy E. Wallace’s book.)

V. IN THE “SPONSORING CHURCH” ARRANGEMENT YOU HAVE FIVE THINGS:

1. The sponsoring church.

2. Contributing churches.

3. Monies they contribute.

4. The means used to do the work.

5. The work.

(1) Remove any one of these five things and you destroy the sponsoring church arrangement.