

Consider another example which was brought on by the Tsunami of December 26, 2004. That horrible wave destroyed thousands along the southern coast of India as well as many more in other parts of the world. When the news of the enormous number of deaths and devastation hit the newspapers and televisions of the world churches of Christ from different countries began to respond. When this aid began to arrive in Tamil Nadu local gospel preachers were put to work feeding the hungry including the delivery of lorry loads of rice and other needed items to the homes of those who had lost loved ones and in many cases their homes and/or their livelihood. This aid came from concerned congregations and no restrictions were put on the recipients such as saying “the church of Christ is limited in benevolence to aiding saints only.”


As the Tamil brothers were providing physical sustenance for the sufferers they were also teaching them of “the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus

Christ” (Acts 8:12). Thus in just eleven months after the Tsunami struck more than 1,500 had obeyed the gospel along the coast and thirty-two new congregations were breaking bread each Lord’s day. This was the case even though the physical help from the church had been discontinued as the people began to recover from the initial shock. Not only so, but in government administered refugee camps, which continue to exist, over 2,000 individuals are enrolled in Bible classes and home studies.

Yet, this kind of aid by the church to unbelievers is forbidden by those who affirm the doctrine of “saints only in benevolence.” Such brethren forbid the church to aid indigent “Tsunami widows” or homeless children because they are not saints.

Well do we say, Beware Of Such Brethren, for they would shame the bride of Christ by telling the world that the church of Christ is forbidden to help any but her own (cf., Matt. 5:46).

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BEWARE OF FORBIDDING BRETHREN

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In many places where Paul and his fellow laborers sought to preach the gospel they were opposed and harassed by the Jews (Acts 13:45; 14:19; 15:5; 17:5, 13; 18:4-6). These opponents of the truth did not want the gospel, nor did they want the Gentiles to have it. In his first letter to the Thessalonians Paul wrote concerning this opposition to his labors and that of others, saying, “the Jews” are “forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved” (I Thess. 2:16).

Someone may ask, but how does this forbidding by Jews relate to the question of “forbidding brethren”? The fact of the matter is that there

was a faction within the church itself in the first century that “taught the brethren, unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1-2). This group was forbidding the conversion of Gentiles to Christ unless they became proselytes to Judaism; for example in the meeting at Jerusalem (Acts 15) on this very question, “some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, it is necessary to circumcise them and command them to keep the law of Moses” (Acts 15:5).

These were forbidding brethren. Not only so, but even while our Savior was on earth this mind-set of negativism came out among the disciples; for we read,

“Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, let the little children come to me and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:13-14).

This spirit of forbidding is alive today, for there is among us a faction that strictly forbids the bride of Christ to help orphaned children in benevolence or anyone who is not a member of the church. They affirm that a Christian, individually and personally, may aid a homeless child or indigent unbeliever, but they strictly forbid the church itself to do so. From their own heart they conjure up many arguments for their claim that the church in benevolence is limited to saints only. When we counter that argument by affirming that the churches of Galatia were told,

“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good unto all, especially to those of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10).

Forbidding brethren respond by claiming that this order was to individuals, that is, to individuals only, and thereby they forbid the church to obey this command. It was to individuals, but not to individuals only. The immediate context and the context of the book show this to be the case. For example in the

same chapter (6:1), the apostle wrote, “Brethren, if any man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness ...”

This command is obviously to individuals, but who would be so bold as to forbid the church in a concerted effort to restore a fallen saint. In fact the Lord Himself, gave order to the church in this matter (Matt. 18:17). In other words Christians as individuals (cf., Acts 8:20-24) are to obey Galatians 6:1, and there is a similar obligation for congregations to obey the same command (cf., I Cor.5:4-5; II Cor. 2:6). In like manner Galatians 6:10 is to individuals and as they have opportunity must respond to that command, but it takes twisting of the text and context to say it is for individuals only.

Let us take a specific example; the church at Banner Elk, North Carolina, USA has set up a restored home for orphaned children near Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, South India, which is

known as Deva Anbu Illam, which is Tamil for “Home of God’s Love.” As of this date there are sixty-five orphan children being cared for in it by sisters in Christ – every day these children have devotion and Bible study. The eldership of Banner Elk in making plans for this home were determined to help the homeless, thus they are careful that it be a refuge for children who have lost their parents and not a place simply where people send their children for care and schooling. May God grant the day when, “as we have opportunity” hundreds of such homes may exist across this great nation.

This is our hope, but those who affirm, “the church’s benevolence is limited to saints only,” strictly forbid a congregation to aid orphans in such a manner. And why? Because they are not saints. And to that we say, God forbid that His people should have such an attitude or mind-set. Well do we say that such are forbidding brethren since they are bold in forbidding churches of Christ to aid orphans in such a home.