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DEVELOPING A CHURCH IN STEWARDSHIP

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Developing a Church in Stewardship

SOME SUGGESTED METHODS

FRANK E. BURKHALTER

In numbers, wealth, prestige, and leadership, God has marvelously blessed Southern Baptists because of their loyalty to the fundamental Christian doctrines and their evangelistic spirit. They have at least 1,000,000 more members than any other evangelical denomination in the South. They are a mighty Kingdom force in the world, but how much more powerful they would be if they were as well developed in the grace of stewardship, or that of acknowledging God as Lord of their lives and of all they possess, as they are in that of evangelism.

According to the reports of the churches to the district associations for the past associational year, our total contributions to local expenses were \$30,771,574.28, and to missions, education, and benevolences, \$8,255,435.08. This makes a total contribution to all causes, \$39,027,009.36. While this is a marked and gratifying advance over what our denomination had done up until the past few years, it still represents less than 2½ cents out of every dollar that Southern Baptists as a whole earn yearly. Of course our average per capita gifts are lower than they would be otherwise, because of our rapidly increasing numbers, which are not as yet developed, and our vast number of wholly undeveloped churches.

Why are not our Baptist forces better developed in the matter of stewardship and the support of our general denominational enter-

prises? Dr. Gambrell once remarked that Baptists do not work well in blind bridles. Our people, for the most part, have not been more liberal in the support of both our local and general work because they have not been more fully informed as to the nature, scope, and need of the work, and because of our failure to adopt an adequate system for the conservation of the finances of our churches.

CHURCHES MUST DO THE TASK

Nor can this information or this better financial system be handed down ready-made from a state or southwide headquarters and begin to function efficiently and immediately. The task is primarily one for the local churches themselves to perform, with such suggestions and assistance, of course, as the general denominational agencies are able to offer, where needed.

Holding the key to the situation in the development of a church in stewardship, as in every other matter, is the pastor, God's chosen leader. How can a pastor help in developing a church in Christian stewardship? A few of the ways in which he can help are suggested as follows.

1. Preach repeatedly upon what God's Word has to say about the duty of giving. A concordance and reference Bible will furnish numerous texts, while the denominational state headquarters will be glad to furnish free tracts and other literature upon the subject.
2. Speak frequently upon the various missionary, educational, and benevolent enterprises fostered by the denomination as a matter of information, and seek to fix in the minds of the members a sense of duty to adequately support those causes.

Study Classes Are Valuable

3. Conduct study classes from time to time in good books on stewardship and missions among groups of leading men and women of the congregation. He should begin with the deacons, who should be an example in stewardship and other phases of Christian service to all the members. It will be helpful if the pastor will invite the deacons into his home for the pursuit of this study. An invitation to join a study class under such circumstances will carry a social as well as religious appeal, and the touch of home life will serve to strengthen the bonds between pastor and deacons. Having first enlisted his deacons in the practice of stewardship, it will be much easier to enlist others. In his further labors, the pastor will have both the example and the help of the deacons.
4. Distribute tracts dealing on missions and stewardship among the members of the congregation. A good method for the accomplishment of this task is to designate some live man or woman for this particular task, though the pastor should employ frequent opportunities to commend from the pulpit good tracts and books and the denominational paper.

Encourage Members To Tithe

5. Encourage the members of the church to covenant together to give not less than one-tenth of their income to the Lord through the church treasury, and to bring in their contributions regularly at the stated periods of worship.
6. Insist upon the adoption of a budget by the church each year that will provide adequately for both the local work of the church and its obligation to the general causes of missions, denominational education, and benevolences.
7. Enlist the members of the church as fully as possible in reading the state denominational paper.
8. Lead the members to give themselves to Christ and His service as fully as possible. Giving their money without themselves will profit them but little, whereas, if they will first give themselves to the Lord, in full personal surrender, they will become good stewards not only of their money but of their time, their energy, their personality, their all.

The deacons can help promote an adequate stewardship program for a church by first setting an example as faithful stewards themselves, giving the pastor undivided co-operation in the work suggested above, seeing to it that either a deacon or a member of the finance committee calls immediately upon each new member coming into the church, explains the various items embraced in each part of the budget, secures a subscription from that one, and provides him with a set of envelopes in which to make his offering. It is a good plan for the deacons to make their own offering at each service, before waiting on the congregation, and in such a manner that the congregation may see their example and be stimulated thereby.

SUNDAY SCHOOLS ARE A FORCE

In the promotion of an adequate stewardship program in a church, the Sunday school superintendent and teachers can play an important part. The superintendent will find frequent opportunities for having a stewardship message presented to the entire school, and can enlist the co-operation of his various officers and teachers in both stressing and practicing stewardship in their departments and classes. Some schools are coming to set aside one Sunday in the year for the study of tithing. It can be readily estimated what the influence upon a boy or girl will be in having heard this fundamental principle of stewardship stressed once each year for a period of years, while his or her ideals and character are being formed. Such a course will not only help develop an army of faithful stewards for the next generation, but will go far to-

ward the fuller enlistment of the young people and adults in the school.

PUPILS CAN HAVE PART

Further opportunities are offered the superintendent for service along this line in offering special recognition for the best essays on stewardship written by pupils of the several departments, for the memorizing of the largest number of Scripture verses relating to stewardship, and for the reading of the largest number of articles, tracts, and books on the subject. The superintendent can help, also, by enlisting young people of talent in painting hand-lettered stewardship mottoes and Scripture verses to be hung on the walls of the Sunday school rooms and church auditorium, which will silently but effectively proclaim their message from week to week. Some mottoes that have met with wide approval in this connection include, "Not how much of my money must I give to God, but how much need I use for myself," and "Give not from the top of your purse, but from the bottom of your heart"; while some appropriate Bible verses that might be employed in this connection are: "Jesus himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive," and "Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase."

With the weekly contact which the teacher has with his pupils from week to week, unmatched opportunities are afforded for developing in the minds and hearts of the pupils, and especially the boys and girls and young people, the message of God's Word on stewardship. In addition to finding stewardship

applications from various lessons from time to time, the conscientious, skillful teacher can point out to his or her pupils the inconsistency in American church members in spending more money for soft drinks alone than they invest in all religious enterprises and similar extravagances. Young people in one denomination known to the writer are being enlisted in wearing inexpensive clothes, denying themselves chewing gum, chocolates, face paint, expensive jewelry, tobacco, soda water, and other non-essentials, and putting the money thus saved into the missionary, educational, and benevolent enterprises of their denomination. It is needless to say this denomination has the most liberal givers, in proportion to their means, of any in America.

WOMEN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ACTIVE

In the majority of our churches the women and the young people are much better informed than the men are on missions and other general enterprises through their study and training in the Woman's Missionary Societies and the B. Y. P. U's. But much remains to be done. Many women are not enrolled in the missionary societies, and hundreds of thousands of our young people do not attend the B. Y. P. U's. Many of our country churches do not have either of these organizations. In the fuller enlistment of the women and young people in their respective organizations in those congregations where such organizations already exist, and in assisting in the formation and nurturing for a season of missionary societies and B. Y. P. U's. in those churches which have none already, our women and young people will probably find their first and

largest opportunity just now in promoting the cause of stewardship in our churches.

In addition to their own study of stewardship in their B. Y. P. U's., our young people can help promote the cause of stewardship in their churches through organizing tithers' bands in the congregation, putting on special stewardship pageants, which frequently drive home such a lesson to persons who would never learn it from a sermon, taking subscriptions for the state Baptist paper and *Home and Foreign Fields*, and in the distribution of tracts and other literature related to missions and stewardship. Texts of pageants on stewardship can be had free from the B. Y. P. U. department of the Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, while the Baptist State Mission Board in each state will furnish free tracts on various phases of our general denominational program.

CHURCHES ARE CHIEF DEPENDENCE

If the co-operative program of Southern Baptists succeeds as it ought, it must be supported by all the churches enlisting all their members in giving regularly to the whole program, as well as to local church expenses, in proportion to their ability. In the accomplishment of this goal there is work for all to do, and in all working together there will be developed a unity, a morale, a generosity, a spirituality, and an evangelistic fervor our churches have never known before. May it be said of Southern Baptists today, as it was of the returned Jewish exiles in the olden days, "The people had a mind to work."