

Ben Vick and
Mark Roberts
discuss the
sponsoring
church issue

Abundant Life

The Sponsoring Church: A Written Debate

A Note of Introduction - Rusty Miller

A recent issue of *Abundant Life* featured an article commenting on a *Bulletin Briefs* article on parachurch organizations. Our article, by Mark Roberts, showed a direct correlation between such organizations and the sponsoring church arrangement as practiced by many of our more liberal brethren, including Jim Waldron, the writer of the *Bulletin Briefs* article. Brother Waldron then contacted Mark, challenging his assertions, and outlining debate propositions. However, when it came time to defend his position in debate, brother Waldron refused, instead asking Mark to debate Ben Vick. After numerous attempts to get brother Waldron to defend his own words, Mark finally relented and agreed to debate brother Vick. The debate, for which you see the propositions on this page, encompasses the entirety of this issue of *Abundant Life*. Please note: due to space limitations that both men agreed to 1000 word limits in their articles.

The Proposition:

The scriptures authorize one church to send funds to another church for the purpose of evangelism or edification.

Affirms: Ben Vick

Denies: Mark Roberts

We think it is important to defend what we believe about the scriptures, and we hope that you will give careful consideration to all that is said here. This is not merely two brethren who disagree; this debate represents a fundamental difference in the application of God's word. One position, as history has shown us, will lead one further down the road to apostasy, while the other clings tight to the New Testament pattern for Bible authority. Please read and study carefully. †

“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

First Affirmative

Ben Vick

The Scriptures authorize one church to send funds to another church for the purpose of evangelism or edification.

The apostles and elders, with the whole church at Jerusalem, sent letters and men to churches in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia, explaining God's will concerning the Gentiles being circumcised and keeping the law of Moses (Acts 15:22-31; 16:4-5). Here is a case of one church's having aided several churches in the areas of evangelism and edification. If one church can send a letter to help another church in these areas, then one church can send Bibles or tracts to another church to do the same. If one church can send Bibles or tracts for the purpose of evangelism and edification, then the same church could send the money to buy Bibles and tracts for the purpose of preaching the gospel to both saint and sinner.

The New Testament clearly teaches that evangelism and benevolence go hand in hand. Jesus went about doing good, healing the sick and preaching the gospel (Matt. 4:23-24; Acts 10:36-42). By letting our lights shine (through evangelism and kind deeds) some will be encouraged to glorify God, i.e., obey the gospel (Matt. 5:14-16). Jesus sent his disciples out on the limited commission to preach and heal the sick (Matt. 10:7-8). Benevolence is a form of evangelism; it is the gospel in action (Acts 2:44; 6:1-7). Paul did not hold to the false idea that evangelism and benevolence are mutually exclusive of each other. As he went preaching, he purposed to help the poor (Gal. 2:9-10).

Since benevolence and evangelism are tied together, then that which a church can do in helping another church in benevolence, can by the same token be done in evangelism. Our brethren who are opposed to one church's cooperating with another church in evangelism argue for an exclusive pattern in evangelism and exclusive pattern in benevolence.

But these brethren are not consistent in so arguing. They do not hesitate to use 1Corinthians 16:1-2 to find financial support for the local preacher, but the passage is dealing with benevolence for the poor saints in Jerusalem. If a church can send money to another church to do a work of benevolence, then it can send money to another church to do a work of evangelism. If 1Corinthians 16:1-2 is an exclusive pattern for benevolence, then the passage, according to these brethren, should not be used to show that the church can support the local preacher out of the church treasury. Let them cease from using it for taking their salary out of the Lord's day contribution.

Sometimes it is countered that if benevolence and evangelism are parallel, then a church that sends money to a children's home can by the same token send money to a missionary society. The children's home and missionary society are not parallel. The children's home takes the place of the home the child lost. It does not rob the church of its work. The missionary society, on the other hand, has no right to exist, attempting to rob the church of its work.

The church at Antioch sent money to the churches in Judea to help them with the famine that was coming (Acts 11:27-30). If one church could send money to other churches to do benevolence, then one church can send money to another church do a work of evangelism or edification.

Paul wrote to the Colossians, "And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea." (Col. 4:16.) Here is a case of a church's aiding another church in edification. If a church can send an inspired letter, it can send the entire Bible to help another church. If it can send one Bible it can send two hundred Bibles. If a church can send another church two hundred Bibles, it can send the money for two hundred Bibles.

Paul wrote, "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.” (Phil.4:15.) When Paul left Macedonia he went to Athens and on to Corinth. While at Corinth Paul said he “robbed other churches taking wages of them” to do the Corinthians service. This support was made possible by the brethren (Silas and Timothy) who came from Macedonia (2 Cor. 11:8-9; Acts 18:5). Other churches supported Paul while he labored at Corinth, but only the Philippian brethren set up an account of credits and debits for Paul.

An analysis of Philippians 4:15 demonstrates that the church at Philippi received funds and sent out funds. Other churches had fellowship with him at this time (2 Cor. 11:8), but only the church at Philippi had fellowship in the matter of giving and receiving. If Philippi were sending to Paul just as other churches, then Paul’s statement would be false. But Paul said that the Philippian church only had this particular kind of fellowship. The adverbial element, “as concerning giving and receiving.” qualifies or modifies the manner of the fellowship. So, here is an example of a church’s receiving money from other churches to do a work of evangelism. If it could be done then, it can be done now.

It is argued that when one church sends money to another church to do a work of evangelism that autonomy is lost by the sending church. But the churches of Macedonia did not lose their autonomy when they sent aid to help the Jerusalem church (2 Cor. 8-9). The Antioch church did not lose its autonomy when it sent help to the churches of Judea (Acts 11:27-30). Why is it the case that when one church sends money to another church for benevolence, the sending church does not lose its autonomy, but if one church sends money to another church for evangelism, the sending church loses its autonomy? †

Ben F. Vick, Jr.
Shelbyville Road Church of Christ
4915 Shelbyville Road
Indianapolis, IN 46237

☎ (317) 783-1065 ✉ inform-vick@juno.com

First Negative

Mark Roberts

It is a delight to study these very important matters with brother Vick and our readers. I am thankful brother Vick is concerned about pleasing God, as I am also.

Does the Bible authorize one congregation to send money to another church for evangelism? Discussions about the sponsoring church led to this debate, so my thoughts and applications center there. Does the Bible authorize the sponsoring church arrangement? Brother Vick says “yes” and it is my task to examine his arguments.

First, brother Vick writes about a church sending letters. Yet no parallel exists between a church sending on a letter, as an apostle commands, and a congregation sending money to a giant church (the sponsoring church) that will oversee the evangelistic work of many churches. There is no parallel to a congregation sending money to another church to do evangelism. How far is brother Vick willing to go with these pseudo-parallels of sending in the NT? In 2 Timothy 4:13 Paul asks Timothy to send his cloak and parchments. Brother Vick’s logic will have the church operating a textile mill and a paper factory! Note: this kind of appeal-to-anything kind of argumentation *begins* brother Vick’s material. If a clear example or command for churches to send funds to one another in evangelism existed, he would have started there, wouldn’t he?

Brother Vick also asks about losing autonomy. Sponsoring churches announce in their promotional literature that they oversee the work done. This violates 1 Peter 5:2’s admonition to shepherd the flock “among you.” Tell us brother Vick: if sponsoring churches can oversee part of another church’s work, could they oversee all of it? The key to understanding why autonomy is not lost in benevolence is realizing that the NT pattern for both benevolence and evangelism is *direct assistance*. Whether it was benevolent relief for
next page please

First Negative Continued

needy brethren or wages sent to a preacher it was sent directly to the need. No sponsoring churches can be found in the NT for either benevolence or evangelism precisely because such schemes destroy autonomy.

Yet brother Vick tries to find a sponsoring church in Philippians 4, mistakenly arguing that Philippi channeled other congregation's funds to Paul. This cannot be so. Philippians 4:15-16 says explicitly that Philippi *alone* sent to Paul at Thessalonica, while Paul says he received support from other churches at Corinth (2 Cor. 11:8-9). Interestingly, Paul credits only Philippi for the funds he received in Macedonia. If Philippi were a sponsoring church why aren't those other churches mentioned? Vick's argument has only the sponsoring church receiving the benefit from God!

Brother Vick also wrote about misusing 1 Corinthians 16 to authorize paying preachers. I have never argued this, because authority for paying preachers is not found there. Tearing up straw men doesn't establish authority for the sponsoring church.

Brother Vick's most important argument is his assertion that benevolence and evangelism are the same. Saying "Benevolence and evangelism go hand in hand," "Jesus went about doing good" and "benevolence is a form of evangelism" brother Vick argues that whatever churches can do in benevolence can be done in evangelism.

This is an amazing assertion because it is exactly what social gospel advocates say. For example, in *The Second Incarnation* Rubel Shelly writes "literacy programs, soup kitchens, drug dependency programs, and prison outreaches need no other justification then, in such activities, the church takes on the heart [of Jesus]" (page 29). Do you see how Shelly argues against Bible authority saying we need "no other justification?" Brother Vick makes the same no-pattern pitch!

Where will such lead? Shelly says "doing good" includes the church being "a hospital, school, motel, publishing house or restaurant," and includes exercise groups and even athletic teams (pp. 70, 96). How about a family life center, brother Vick? With this thinking

just what is *not* permissible for a church to do, as long as it can be justified as "benevo-lism?"

While this debate is not about benevolence Acts 6:3-4 makes a clear distinction in evangelism and benevolence. There the seven serve tables so the apostles could instead be involved in "prayer and the ministry of the word." The apostles knew that benevolence is doing good to people, while evangelism is teaching the Gospel. The social gospel movement merges these, urging the church to "buy" a hearing with social aid. The NT exposes this as a failure to trust in the power of the cross, our only true drawing card (John 12:32). The NT church never did "benevo-lism" or "bought" conversions. Individual Christians did good, but this is not evangelism, nor can it be confused with the church's work (1 Tim. 5:16). Brother Vick's line of thinking here is not only ultra-liberal (hence his agreement with Shelly) but it is also ultimately destructive to the mission of the church itself. **The church is not a do-good agency, brother Vick.** It has a much higher mission: the saving of souls!

Obviously, many today misunderstand Jesus' works. John 20:30-31 teaches Jesus did signs to prove His deity. Vick says Jesus did miracles to "help people." I expect folks will know who is right. Missing this is not inconsequential, for Vick's "church does as Jesus does" reasoning includes, he says, Jesus' healing miracles. Would such then authorize the church to build hospitals, a.k.a. Catholicism? I did not expect Vick to argue like the Salvation Army, Catholic nuns and Rubel Shelly!

In conclusion, please realize that brother Vick has failed to produce a command, example or necessary inference authorizing a church to send funds to another congregation in evangelism. Instead he can only find imaginary parallels and adopt the argumentation of the ultra-liberals, destroying all appeals to Bible authority.

Today many would remake the church into a do-good society. Others are sure the church must be what Jesus desires. I pray that even if brother Vick cannot see his errors in reasoning our readers will, causing them to do only that for which "book, chapter and verse" can be found. †

Second Affirmative

Ben Vick

The Scriptures authorize one church to send funds to another church for the purpose of evangelism or edification. This proposition was affirmed in my first article. Brother Mark Roberts in his first response has attempted to prove it wrong by mere assertion, prejudice and misrepresentation.

It was shown from the New Testament that one church may aid another church in both evangelism and edification (Acts 15:22-31; 16:4-5). If a church can send an inspired letter to another church, it can send a Bible to the same. If a church can send a Bible to another church, it can send the money for a Bible or many Bibles. Why does the practice of one church's aiding another church in evangelism or edification become wrong as soon as money enters into the picture? Roberts cannot argue that it is wrong for one church to send a Bible to another church. If he does, then he is arguing with the apostles and elders who did that very thing (Acts 15; Col.4:16). If this is a false parallel, then let my opponent show how it is not parallel. This he did not and cannot do.

If a church gives me a pair of shoes or gives me the money to buy a pair of shoes, it has still provided me with shoes. The fact that the church provides me a pair of shoes does not mean that the church is authorized to operate a shoe factory. Roberts' charge that I favor a social gospel as does Rubel Shelly is a misrepresentation of my view and attempts to prejudice our readers.

The charge that a sending church loses its autonomy because it sends money to another church to do a work, whether evangelistic or benevolent, is false. In reality, the church is exercising its autonomy in such a situation. The churches in Macedonia and Achaia did not lose their autonomy because they sent money to the church at Jerusalem to do a work of benevolence (Roms. 15:26). Again I ask, "Why is it the case that when one church sends money to another church for benevolence, the

sending church does not lose its autonomy, but if one church sends money to another church for evangelism, the sending church loses its autonomy?"

Brother Roberts tells us that the New Testament "pattern for both benevolence and evangelism is *direct assistance*." Such is patently false. Luke records, "Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul." (Acts 11:29-30.) Unless the elders were the only needy ones in Judea, the money was not sent directly to the needy. The elders had to disburse the funds as needed.

If a church does not lose its autonomy when it sends money directly to the preacher, how does it lose its autonomy when it sends the money to another church? If the receiving preacher is not robbing the sending church of its autonomy, then neither would the receiving church be robbing the sending church of the same. If the receiving church is overseeing the sending church's work, why would not the receiving preacher be overseeing the sending church's work?

The proposition that I am affirming states that a church is authorized to aid another church in evangelism or edification. One eldership cannot oversee two congregations. Neither can an eldership oversee a man who is not among them (1 Peter 5:1-4). In reality, a sponsoring congregation (that is, in particular, the eldership of a congregation) oversees the funds of a mission work or a foreign evangelist. It cannot in actuality oversee the work or the man if either is not among them. If, however, the church does not believe the work is going as it should, or the preacher begins to preach error, the church can certainly exercise its autonomy and stop the support

Previously I stated, "If I Corinthians 16:1-2 is an exclusive pattern for benevolence, then the passage, according to these brethren, should not be used to show that the church can support the local preacher out of the church treasury." But Roberts said that he did not get his authority for paying preachers from 1

next page please

Second Affirmative Continued

Corinthians 16. I was not, however, questioning authority to pay a local preacher, but I want to know where is his authority to take money out of the church treasury to pay the local preacher. In the first century the church treasury was used for benevolent purposes.

These brethren grant that a church can send funds to another church to do a work of benevolence, but according to them, there is an exclusive pattern for benevolence and another for evangelism; thus, it is sinful for a church to send funds to another church to do a work of evangelism or edification. But if it be sinful to mix the patterns of evangelism and benevolence, then they are guilty because they pay the local preacher from the church treasury, which in the first century was used for benevolence. Do you see their inconsistency?

Brother Roberts needs to study my first article again. It was not said that benevolence and evangelism are the same as he charged. It was stated that they go hand in hand and that benevolence is a form of evangelism. So, every argument he made to answer the view that evangelism and benevolence are the same has no bearing on the issue.

A study of Philippians 4:15-16 shows that a special fellowship existed between Paul and the church at Philippi. Verse 15 states no church had set up an account of giving and receiving, but Philippi. The kind of fellowship that existed between Paul and Philippi is modified by the adverbial element, “as concerning giving and receiving.” If Roberts will diagram the verse, he will see that the same ones (the Philippians) who did the giving also did the receiving. It is true that no other church sent to Paul when he was at Thessalonica, but when he left Macedonia and labored in Corinth other churches did support him (2 Cor. 11:8). It is reasonable and in harmony with scripture to believe that this was done through the church at Philippi.

The proposition stands.

†

Second Negative Mark Roberts

No Bible authority for the sponsoring church arrangement exists. Vick’s wild appeals to anything and everything establish nothing. This can be seen by examining the questions I asked Vick that he didn’t answer.

For example, I asked “if sponsoring churches can oversee part of another church’s work, could they oversee all of it?” Vick didn’t answer! Instead he confuses things by talking about church autonomy when direct assistance is sent. Yet the objection to churches sending to another church in evangelism isn’t “loss of autonomy” but a lack of authority. In the New Testament churches sent to churches in benevolence, not evangelism. Sending in evangelism is without authority. Whatever its effects on autonomy, it is still wrong. Thus, my questions about autonomy focus not on cases of direct assistance but indirect assistance (sponsoring churches). How can a church hand over control of its money to another congregation? Such violates autonomy. That’s why I asked: if a church can let another congregation oversee some of its work can it let that church oversee all of it?

Vick’s arguing autonomy is not lost because a church can stop sending money won’t work. When I invest in a mutual fund I give up control of my money. The fund manager makes investment decisions, not me. I can leave the fund, but while invested I cannot control my money. See the parallel? The sponsoring church is the fund manager — it controls the money sent in. A sending church can get out, but while “in” they have lost their autonomy! So again, if a church can surrender autonomy in one area, can it give it up entirely?

Vick tells us sponsoring churches don’t oversee the work, just the funds. Really? Why then do ads and reports from sponsoring churches announce they are overseeing the work? Brother Vick knows better! If he or our readers don’t, I will be glad to send *anyone* documentation (examples of such ads). I even have announcements of sponsoring churches taking oversight of entire congregations!

Vick also didn't seem to notice my questions about Philippi. He is certain Philippi is a sponsoring church, finding a bank account in the phrase "concerning giving and receiving." Yet there is nothing (despite his reference to "adverbial modifiers") in Philippians 4:15 that indicates, in Greek or English, that Philippi was a sponsoring church or opened an account for Paul. The passage means what it says: while in Thessalonica only Philippi sent Paul money. **Vick admitted that I am right about this**, but then says that because Paul received funds in a different place at a different time (Corinth) "*it is reasonable to believe Philippi was a sponsoring church.*" What an admission! The sponsoring church rests solely on a blatant assumption! Instead of Bible authority are we supposed to settle for what Vick deems reasonable?

Vick also ignored all my questions exposing "benevolism." He objects to being compared to Rubel Shelly, yet he wrote "benevolence is a form of evangelism" and the church "must do good" like Jesus did. That is precisely what Shelly says, and I quoted Shelly to document it. How then am I misrepresenting Vick? Vick's writings betray his acceptance, in principle, of the social gospel. Thus, he won't answer my questions "Can the church operate a family life center?" and "If the church must do good like Jesus, does this authorize building hospitals?" Vick cannot be consistent and say "no" to these "good works," can he?

While Vick refuses to answer my questions, I *will* answer his. First, there is no parallel in a church sending on an epistle and Vick's sponsoring church because Paul didn't order letters be sent to a sponsoring church which would collect all epistles, and then decide to whom to send them. Further, churches sending on apostolic letters involves no money. Where is the parallel to what we are discussing: sending funds to sponsoring churches? Will Vick really make an argument from every passage in which something is sent? In Luke 9:52 Jesus sent messengers. With Vick's logic churches will be opening Western Union offices!

Second, Vick doesn't seem to understand Bible authority for paying preachers. Such can't be found in 1 Corinthians 16, and I said so. That passage authorizes a treasury, and gives information on how to raise funds for that treasury. Treasuries are also implied in 2 Corinthians 11:8 and 1 Timothy 5:9. Yes, we might conclude the treasury was only for benevolence if 1 Corinthians 16 were the only treasury passage *but it's not!* Let's use all Scripture to determine the treasury's use. Philippians 4:15 authorizes the church to pay preachers.

It's apparent that Vick has no case. **If authority for sponsoring churches could be found Vick wouldn't have to make unwarranted assumptions or parrot Rubel Shelly.** Further, in a recent *Bulletin Briefs* Vick decries how some sponsoring churches (like the Herald of Truth) are out of control and becoming, in his words, "*little missionary societies!*" So, there is no authority for them, they get out of control, and worse, they divide brethren. Isn't it time everyone realizes the church would be much better off without sponsoring churches? Why can't we just do like the NT church did, sending directly to the preacher? All agree that is right!

Vick is not the only one with concerns about sponsoring churches. Many are re-thinking this issue. I am thankful that Vick has provided such clear evidence that no authority for sponsoring churches can be found — that should encourage our readers to study this matter further. If you will contact me I will send you more information to help that study. Westside's website, www.justChristians.com, is loaded with good material, and Westside's free paper, *Abundant Life*, also examines these matters. Please let us assist your further study. Our plea is "book, chapter and verse" for all we do. Since it is obvious no authority for sponsoring churches exists, that they cause division, and even their advocates admit problems with them, we reject them as divisive and unauthorized. †

Mark Roberts
2300 West Pioneer Drive
Irving, TX 75061

☎ (972) 986-9131 ✉ mroberts@flash.net

In our day of political correctness some may be a bit squeamish about a frank exchange of differences on an issue, as in this month's AL. Some might even argue that Christians shouldn't debate. Why did brother Vick and I debate the sponsoring church issue?

First, because it is right to do so. The old King James mistranslates the word "strife" as "debate" in Romans 1:29. Some will appeal to that verse or others like it to say Christians must not debate. Yet Jude says we must "contend earnestly for the faith" (Jude 1:3). Peter urges an answer be given to any who ask about our faith (1 Peter 3:15), and Paul never hesitated to engage in clear discussion of what was right and what was wrong (see Acts 17:2ff; 28:17ff). A debate is nothing more than

a special means of teaching the truth. As Christians we should look for every opportunity to teach the truth, debates included.

Second, because it is helpful to do so. A debate allows both sides of an issue to be heard, and weaknesses in a position to be clearly demonstrated. In short, truth can shine brightly in the crucible of controversy. I believe one of the reasons that so few debates are conducted today is because many are too cowardly to defend their false views, knowing that in debate the truth would crush their pet error. Yes, some debates have been conducted with malice and perhaps that is why some stay off the debating platform. However, I thought brother Vick conducted himself as a Christian in our debate, I hope I did the same, and I believe much good will come from brethren carefully considering both sides of this matter.

Third, because debates say truth is important. Rather than just join the "you have your truth and I have mine" crowd a debate says "There is objective truth, let's find it." I disagree thoroughly with brother Vick, but can at least respect his convictions. Of what use are the spineless who will agree with everything and stand for nothing? So I pray that those who read this written debate will be helped by it, and will see how vital obeying the truth really is.

Mark



**The
Preacher's
Pen**
Mark Roberts

Abundant Life is published monthly as a teaching and edification tool of the Westside church of Christ. Subscriptions are free to anyone interested in serving Christ and knowing Him fully. Send all subscriptions, suggestions, ideas, and criticisms to Rusty Miller, Editor, **Abundant Life**, c/o Westside church of Christ, or email Rusty at Mil1341@dellepro.com.

The Westside church is composed of Christians who simply seek to take the Bible seriously, and do exactly as it instructs. You are welcome at all of our services. We have Bible classes on Sunday morning at 9:00 a.m. and Wednesday night at 7:30 p.m. We meet for worship on Sunday at 9:50 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.

Need more information about Westside? Surf our website at **justChristians.com** or call one of the numbers below.

ELDERS

Don Gipson	(972) 252-5427
Jim Kersey	(817) 429-0500
G.C. Miller	(817) 267-0578
Rusty Miller	(817) 571-2450
Art Sharp	(972) 255-7337
Hulin Smith	(817) 545-8489

PREACHER

Mark Roberts	(972) 986-9131 mroberts@flash.net
--------------	--------------------------------------

WESTSIDE CHURCH OF CHRIST
2300 West Pioneer Drive
Irving, Texas 75061

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID PERMIT
NO. 97
IRVING, TX

Return Service Requested