

RAISING FUNDS FOR THE LORD'S WORK

By Roger D. Campbell, via "Seek The Old Paths"

"Do you do any fund raisers with your youth group?" That is the exact question that a young woman recently asked me over the telephone. She had called the church building in an effort to promote a product, or products, that her group was selling. We frequently receive such phone calls, as well as advertisements in the mail, which indicate that there are lots of companies or organizations out there that are trying to be "helpful." They want to assist "churches" in raising money for their projects. Everything from selling T-shirts, pizza, and Bibles, is promoted as a way for religious groups to raise money.

It is an undeniable fact that the work of the Lord Jesus requires money. Money is needed to pay for Bibles, buy grape juice for the Lord's Supper, support the preaching of the Gospel, and a multitude of other matters. We would be silly to think that the church can get by just fine without any incoming funds. God knows that the church needs money in order to carry out its activities. That is why He included first day of the week contributions as a part of the worship of His saints (I Cor. 16:2).

Sometimes it is necessary to make a special effort to raise funds for a special cause. We often call it "fund-raising." For instance, those Christians that go overseas to teach the Gospel usually have to raise support for their work. Some members of the church are able to finance their own evangelistic activities, but this is the exception and not the rule. The Bible teaches that those who *"preach the gospel should live of the gospel"* (I Cor. 9:14). That simply means that faithful Gospel preachers are worthy of support. In 1982, in an effort to raise funds for our projected work in Taiwan, Republic of China, I visited or spoke at 53 congregations in less than six months. One thing never entered our mind when it came to raising funds for our work: not once did we consider asking a congregation to put on a bake sale, car wash, donkey basketball game, or any other such project in order to raise funds to help support us.

In the New Testament, we read about the first-century church raising funds for its work. How did it do so? Once, the prophets of God predicted that there was going to be a famine. How did the church in Antioch of Syria respond? *"Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea"* (Acts 11:29).

We also read that Paul later went among the Gentile churches in order to collect *"a certain contribution for the poor among the saints"* that were in Jerusalem

(Rom. 15:26, ASV). How did he raise those funds? Hear the Bible's answer: *"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay be him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come"* (I Cor. 16:1-2). The work of the first century church was funded by contributions from its members. There is no New Testament example of churches having special fund-raisers like bake sales, car washes, etc. There is no New Testament command to do such, there is no implication that such was/may be done, and there is no direct statement about such fund-raising projects. That simply means that there is no authority in the Bible for the Lord's church to use such means to raise funds for His work.

I grew up in a denomination. The country group of which I was a member had different types of annual fund-raisers. The "adult class" had an annual "chicken supper." The public was invited to come and eat. Those that ate had to pay for their meal and the collected funds were used for the activities of the denomination. It was, indeed, money-making project. And, our youth group (called "MYF" for "Methodist Youth Fellowship") had its annual combination chili supper, bake sale and auction. All of these means brought in healthy amounts of money.

There was a time when there was a visible distinction between churches of Christ and denominational bodies. One of the clear-cut differences was that while denominations often employed bake sales, car washes, and other types of special activities to raise funds, the churches of Christ refused to use such man-imagined methods, pointing out that such activities are without scriptural authority. Sadly, things are different now. Yes, the denominations still have their fund-raising sales, etc. What has changed? Some that identify themselves as churches of Christ are now following the course of the denominations and have their own car washes and fund-raising meals to help finance the work of the church.

When I left the denominational world nearly three decades ago, I never thought I would see the day when its man-made teaching and practices would infiltrate the Lord's church. To me, it is a great tragedy that the influence of denominations is being seen more and more in the church of our Lord. The Lord has a prescribed way of raising funds for His work. It is via the free-will contributions that His children are commanded to make on the first day of the week (I Cor. 16:1-2).

That is the Bible way. Let us stick with it and stay away from all unauthorized fund-raising activities.