Should Churches Do Outside Fundraising?

The question before us is, "Should churches seek to raise funds outside the church body? Particularly, should they seek money from unbelievers in some form or fashion?" First, let me state clearly what my position is, then, develop the biblical reasoning behind it, and finally, make application to the life of the church. God has promised to supply the needs of His children and His work (Matthew 6:33, Philippians 4:19). I know we can agree on that. The question then becomes, however, "What is His method for supporting His work?" **My position, stated positively, is that the Bible teaches that God's people, not unbelievers, are to support His work. My position stated negatively is that I believe that it is wrong for believers to actively solicit unbelievers to support God's work.** I believe that my position, stated both positively and negatively, is clearly taught in Scripture, and that is what I hope to demonstrate.

Beginning in the Old Testament, people were taught to tithe and give offerings to God. Abraham was the first person to tithe (Genesis 14). Notice that this predates the Law. Malachi 3:10 says, "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this," says the Lord of Hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it." Remember also that the priests were supported by taking an appointed portion of the sacrifices the people brought. In part, Paul based his teaching that the Church is to support ministers on these Old Testament truths. There is a lot that can be said about these truths, but the main point that I want you to notice now is that God's people are to give to God's work.

Let's move into the New Testament. When Jesus sent out the twelve, He said to them, "And as you go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. *Freely you have received, freely give.* Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food. Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out" (Matthew 10: 7-11). The principles here seem to be that we are not to solicit funds ("freely give") from unbelievers we are ministering to, but we are to be supported by fellow disciples ("who in it is worthy").

Another relevant passage of Scripture is 1 Corinthians 9. In this passage, Paul is explaining to the Corinthians that he had chosen not to ask for material support from them, but that, in reality, he had every right to expect it from them. He used a series of common senses analogies and then appealed to the law (v. 9) to make his point to them. I believe the reason that he chose to forfeit his right to receive financial remuneration from them was that he knew they would use it against him (1 Cor. 9:15, 18) because of their spiritual immaturity (3:1) and the challenges they were making to his apostolic authority (1 Cor. 1:10-17; 2 Cor. 3-6, 10-13). However, while sharing that a minister has a right to not accept payment from a church, he clearly reaffirmed the Old Testament principle that those who are being ministered to are to financially support those who are ministering to them (see also Galatians 6:6). He states this principle in verse 14, when he says, "Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel." There are two principles that I believe can be drawn

from this in relation to the discussion of fundraising. First, this passage reaffirms that God's people (the church) are to support God's ministers and God's work. Second, if Paul would not receive financial compensation from immature Christians who were supposed to be supporting him, it seems to me that we can infer that he would not solicit support for his ministry from those who do not know Christ.

Another biblical principle that clearly speaks to this issue is the fact that we are to first give our lives to the Lord and then give our money to Him. 2 Corinthians 8-9 is the most extended passage in the Bible about giving. It lays out multiple principles regarding the grace of giving. Paul begins his discussion in these chapters by pointing out the example of the churches of Macedonia who gave sacrificially to meet the needs of others. In that context Paul says in verse 5 that "they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us [financially, according to the preceding verses] by the will of God." The church needs to minister to unbelievers instead of asking them to give to the ministry. The church needs to be sharing the free gift of salvation with unbelievers instead of asking them for money. The church needs to be teaching people that God wants their lives, first and foremost, and asking them to commit their lives to the Lord. The church needs to be careful to teach people accurately that salvation is by grace through faith alone and not giving them the impression that they can earn or buy their way to God through good deeds. Non-Christians often look for excuses to reject the gospel and the church. Studies show that one of the most common excuses in our society today is that churches are always asking for money. A good friend of mine who is now a pastor and his wife did not become Christians until they were in their 30's. He shared with me about an experience they had one time before their conversion when a church was doing a fundraiser and his wife said to him, "Why don't those Christians ask their God for that money instead of asking us?" I read a letter to the editor of a newspaper in a state where the lottery was being debated that was a response to pastors speaking out against the lottery. In effect, the letter said that churches should stop the hypocrisy of opposing the lottery as long as they are having bingos, raffles, sales, etc. These anecdotes serve as examples of the fact that the church can be a stumbling block to the reception of the gospel by asking unbelievers for money instead of sharing the grace of God with them.

I also believe that 3 John 5-8 speaks clearly to the fundraising issue. This passage deals with how Christians ought to support missionaries. John wrote to Gaius "if you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well" (v. 6). He told Gaius that "we may become fellow workers for the truth" (v. 8) by doing this. Sandwiched between those two verses, John relates in verse 7 that these missionaries "went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles." His name's sake refers to going forth in the name of Christ. Gentiles is used figuratively here of unbelievers. Putting this together then, the principle espoused in these verses is that Christians are to support those who go forth in Christ's name (in context, referring to missionaries, but in my opinion, applying to anyone who ministers in Christ's name) because those ministers are not to look to unbelievers for their support. I believe this principle is based on the statement of Christ where he said, "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8b). Here are what some evangelical commentators have to say about it:
In *The Gospel and Epistles of John,* F.F Bruce writes, "Since these teachers went out on their journeys for Christ's sake, it was fitting that they should be supported by Christ's people. Had

they accepted hospitality from 'the Gentiles,' it might have given the impression that their own people did not support them adequately."
In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary,* Zane Hodges writes, "To go out on behalf of that Name was a supreme honor. Naturally, it was inappropriate for those who did so to seek support from those who did not believe in or honor that Name…..Even in the present day, there is something unseemly in a preacher of the gospel soliciting funds from people to whom he offers God's free salvation."
In *The Expositors Bible Commentary, Volume 12,* Glenn Barker writes, "Whether it was Jesus' words 'Freely you have received, freely give' (Mt. 10:8), as Marshall conjectures, or simply common sense that forbade them to take support from pagans, we do not know."
In *The New American Commentary,* Daniel Akin writes, "The traveling emissaries of Jesus Christ did not seek to finance the work by appeals to the lost for their money. They depended, and rightly so, on the generosity and gifts of fellow believers."
In *The Believer's Bible Commentary,* William MacDonald writes, "These men looked to the Lord alone for the supply of their needs. They would not accept support from the unconverted. To do so would imply that their Master was too poor to provide for them. It might also give the unsaved a false ground of self-righteousness on which to rest. What a rebuke this is to the money-raising methods of Christendom today!"
In *The Bible Exposition Commentary,* Warren Wiersbe writes, "Keep in mind that there were many wandering teachers in that day, sharing their ideas and begging for money. While the Lord Jesus taught definitely that God's servants deserve support (Luke 10:7), the standard in the New Testament is that this support comes from God's people. 'Taking nothing of the Gentiles' means that these itinerant workers would not solicit help from the unsaved."

Homer Lindsay Jr., long-time pastor of First Baptist Church Jacksonville, put it this way; "God's plan was never for man to use worldly schemes to raise money for the spread of His message. God did not plan for His churches to have sales, dinners, raffles or bazaars to raise money…Such schemes area a shame and a disgrace to the church and certainly can never be pleasing to the Lord."

The preceding paragraphs detail why I believe that the **biblical principle is that God's people are to support God's work and that we are not to solicit unbelievers.** I do not believe that automatically precludes us from receiving money from an unbeliever if he or she offers it instead of us soliciting it. I think that is something that has to be considered on a case-by-case basis. However, let me state again that I believe the principle for the church is that God's people are to fund the ministry by obeying God in giving their tithes and offerings. If Christians obey God in this area, churches will not have financial problems. I think that it is better if churches do not do fundraisers at all, but if they do, they should be only within the church body on a very limited basis. Obedience to Scripture probably eliminates the need altogether. Obedience in this area will cause us to experience the faithfulness of God and prevent us from being a stumbling block to unbelievers.