

# CHURCHES HELPING CHURCHES

Too often, rather than cooperating, likeminded churches in the same region function independently from one another or, worse, in competition. However, a close study of the New Testament reveals churches enjoyed a shared regional identity along with a vital partnership together in God's mission. There was no such thing in the New Testament as an "independent church." There was no such thing as a church that was not part of a strategic collective of churches sharing mutually in burden, blessing, and mission together. New Testament churches were autonomous, governed by their own local elders, and yet were fully interdependent. Churches in a particular region today, therefore, ought to be intentional to share in fellowship and mission together with other likeminded (in doctrine and ministry philosophy) churches, standing ready to help one another fulfill God's mission.

## 1. New Testament churches enjoyed a shared regional identity

- a. New Testament epistles were addressed to all the believers or churches of a particular region. (Keep in mind, most New Testament churches were small enough for gatherings to fit into a large home.) This suggests that churches in a particular region shared common problems and needed common encouragement.
  - i. Galatians 1:1 – *To the churches of God in Galatia...*
  - ii. Revelation 1:4 – *To the seven churches in the province of Asia...*  
*\*see also Rom 1:7, 2 Cor 1:1, Eph 1:1, Phil 1:1, 1 Thess 5:27, 1 Pet 1:1*
- b. New Testament epistles included greetings from churches that shared a regional identity.
  - i. 1 Corinthians 16:19 – *The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings.*
  - ii. Hebrews 13:24 – *Those from Italy send you greetings.*  
*\*see also 2 Cor 13:13, Phil 4:22*
- c. New Testament epistles were expected to read by churches in surrounding regions.
  - i. Colossians 4:16 – *After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.*
- d. New Testament writers and leaders often thought regionally with regard to evangelism and ministry.
  - i. Acts 19:10 – *This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.*
  - ii. 1 Thessalonians 1:7-8 – *And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia – your faith in God has become known everywhere.*  
*\*see also Acts 16:6, 18:23, 27, 19:22, 20:10, Rom 15:23-24, 16:5, 1 Cor 16:15, 1 Thess 4:10, 2 Tim 1:15, 4:10*

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## 2. New Testament churches enjoyed a shared missional partnership

- a. Churches (often very sacrificially) commissioned their servants to start and/or serve other churches.
  - i. Acts 11:25-26 – Barnabas brings Paul from Tarsus to help in the work in Antioch.
  - ii. Acts 13:1-3 – Paul and Barnabas are sent by the church in Antioch to start new churches elsewhere.
  - iii. Romans 16:1 – *I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church of Cenchreae.* Phoebe is sent from Cenchreae (near Corinth) to deliver Paul’s letter to Rome.
  - iv. 1 Corinthians 16:10 – *When Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am. No one then should treat him with contempt. Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me.* Timothy is sent from Ephesus to help in Corinth for a specific time.

*\*see also Acts 18:1-28, 20:4, 27:2, 1 Cor 16:17, Eph 6:21-22, Col 4:7, Col 4:13, 1 Thess 3:2*

- b. Churches gave to support God’s work in other churches.
  - i. Romans 15:26 – *For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord’s people in Jerusalem.*
  - ii. 2 Corinthians 8:1-7 – The Macedonian churches, with a shared identity, are held up as an example to the church of Corinth in the area of giving as Paul seeks to raise money for the church in Jerusalem.
  - iii. 2 Corinthians 9:2 – *For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give, and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action.*
  - iv. Philippians 4:15-16 – New believers at Philippi supported Paul’s work in nearby Thessalonica.

*\*see also 1 Cor 16:1-3, 2 Cor 8:16-21*

## 3. New Testament churches enjoyed a powerful synergy in ministry together

- a. Churches cooperating in a region reached more people together for Christ than they ever could have on their own. Consider the example in Asia. Luke tells us that within two years everyone in Asia had heard the word of the Lord (Acts 19:10). This happened because churches networked together to train leaders, plant other churches, and saturate a region with the gospel.
- b. Churches cooperating in a region trained more servants together for gospel ministry than they ever could have on their own. Consider the example again in Asia through leaders trained in Ephesus along with examples in Antioch and Achaia.
- c. Churches cooperating in a region together raised more funding for ministry than they ever could have on their own. Consider the offering for the Jerusalem church that the churches in Macedonia and Achaia worked together to support (Romans 15:26).
- d. We should not be surprised at such synergy. The Scripture tells us that “Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12).