

fuse to seek unity to the extreme of two close works dying out first, have we shown unity?

Are We Prepared to Receive Help?

Often brethren refuse to accept benevolent help because of pride. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to assist those in need (2 Cor. 8:13–14), but he also tells them that they may need to receive the same in the future. Paul is describing God's plan for providing for one another. We must, however, find humility and accept help that is offered. We do this for two reasons: **[1]** it is God's plan, and **[2]** it allows our brethren to exercise their faith and show their love for us. Who are we to deny them that opportunity? Will we humble ourselves and be gracious receivers?

Are We Prepared to Use This Opportunity to Teach?

People are suffering and hurting. Many are anxious because the "security" they had in their jobs, investments, and assets is not as secure as they thought. This is an opportunity for us to show them true eternal security (Matt. 6:19–21; Col. 3:1–2). What better way to demonstrate that "This World is Not My Home?" We have an opportunity to share the glorious treasure of heaven with people who are hurting because of the troubles of this world. Are we prepared? Economic hardship shouldn't be troubling to God's people. We have the opportunity to show brotherly love, display our working faith, exercising unity, and teach the lost. Perhaps instead of worrying about the economy we should give thanks for it!



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THINGS ABOVE

"Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth"

— [Colossians 3:1–2] —

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Are We Prepared for the Recession?

By Terry Francis

The news is filled with one story after another about the economic recession. The President and Congress have passed a second bailout plan and people everywhere are discussing stocks, unemployment, taxes, tax breaks, economic downturns, foreclosure, bailout, etc. We are surrounded by stories of financial "gloom and doom."

One recurring theme seems to be, "Were you prepared for the economic hardship?" or "Are you prepared for more economic hardship?" The thought behind the questions obviously are focused on earthly concerns. Can you survive six months or a year of financial hard times? Do you have the savings to get you through a period of unemployment? Have you spent and borrowed wisely so you are not in danger of losing your home

or other assets?

One wonders what the spiritual applications may be. I've witnessed numerous discussions between Christians about the economy. The majority of the talk centers on physical and earthly consequences. I wonder why we don't consider the ramifications of these times on the church and spiritual opportunities. Are we ready for an economic recession as God's people?

Are We Ready to Bear the Burdens of Our Brethren?

The principle of burden bearing in Galatians 6 is generally limited to spiritual burdens. What about physical burdens? Shouldn't we carry that load as well? Paul wrote, "As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (6:10). This passage, in contrast to v. 1, is almost always applied to physical things. A true economic recession is no respecter of persons. It affects God's people, too.

The Jerusalem church provides an excellent model. In Acts 2, the church begins with a massive conversion of three thousand. Many of those were from other countries and elected to remain in Jerusalem. There was an obvious obstacle to that decision—their jobs, homes, and other provisions were not there. The church provided the solution. Brethren sold their possessions and provided for those who were in need (2:45). This continues as some donated profits from selling off land to provide for their brethren (4:36–37; 5:1–10). Benevolent care of widows was also present in the early church (6:1–7). The church in Jerusalem cared for each other by bearing their financial burdens. Are we ready to do the same?

Jesus said the world would know us if we love one another (John 13:34–35). John later wrote that true love is seen in action, not speech. He specifically asks, "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart

against him, how does God's love abide in him?" (1 John 3:17). James compared those who refused to give food and clothing to needy brethren as having dead faith (2:14–17).

Are we prepared to assist our brethren? If a brother loses his house, will we open our home to him? If he loses his job, will we provide for him? If a sister loses her transportation and we have two cars, will we allow her the use of one? If we love our brethren, the questions are answered.

Are Churches Prepared to Unite if Necessary?

One real consequence of economic hardship is the effect it has on churches. The work of the church is dependent on the collection from the saints. That contribution may decrease as times become more difficult. What is the solution?

Most cities have multiple congregations. Some churches meet within minutes of one another and often the division is not based on doctrinal matters, but personality conflicts. Other instances may be the result of history from a time prior to the invention of automobiles where traveling a few miles was more difficult. If economic hardship causes two works close by to struggle financially, what is the obvious solution? Unity!

Are congregations prepared to settle their differences or lay aside their history to unite for a greater cause? If two works cannot survive because of economic hardship, it is likely one united work could. Certainly there are questions that arise from such arrangements concerning property, treasuries, etc. But the questions can easily be handled if we seek God's counsel and wisdom.

God's people are to be united. Jesus prayed, "That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also maybe be in us, so that they world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21). The world believes we are God's people when we love one another and are united. When we re-