

SECTION 2

MINISTERING GOD'S LOVE IN THE MIDST OF CRISIS

But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well.

Should I not be concerned about that great city?

JONAH 4:11

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

JAMES 1:27

Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

MATTHEW 25:34-36

THE BIBLICAL RATIONALE AND PRACTICAL EXPRESSIONS OF DISASTER RELIEF MINISTRY THROUGH STATE CONVENTIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS

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BIBLICAL RATIONALE

When asked to write about the difference made by state conventions and associations in Disaster Relief, I immediately began a search for this topic. To my amazement most of the articles that surfaced were not from a Baptist perspective. Since the journal is about “Baptist Theology and Ministry”, I wanted to show the interaction of the two, theology and ministry in Disaster Relief. Rather than citing how many meals were served or volunteer man-hours invested in the Katrina tragedy, let’s look at the broader scope of cooperative efforts by denominational entities from a Biblical Rationale.

There are examples too numerous to cite from the Old Testament to show a God who is concerned about the needs of people during crisis. Joseph was sent to Egypt in order to prepare a place for God’s people to be cared for during a famine, Genesis 50:20. Ruth benefited from the law providing for the indigent of the community. God said He was the father of the orphan, Psalm 68:5. His call to cultural social justice is clear in Micah 6:8. Included in social justice is to care for the less fortunate who are lacking due to a calamity. Throughout the Old Testament God is seen as the One who cares for people in time of difficulty. He sought to minister to people by using human instrumentality.

Jesus’ acts of compassion evidences His divinity. He announced that His earthly ministry would be accentuated with acts of mercy, Luke 4:18, 19. Sharing with the poor, touching the hearts of the suffering, giving hope to the captives, helping the blind, freeing the oppressed and telling the Good News are all examples provided by Jesus. He set the standard for His followers. Jesus underscored his innumerable acts of kindness by illustrating a judgment that exposes deficiencies and highlights efforts in touching lives, Matthew 25: 31-36. Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and comforting the lonely are direct activities of a Disaster Relief Ministry. Matthew 25 is the quintessential passage for Disaster Relief ministry.

Jesus taught that everyone is our neighbor. The story we call “The Good Samaritan” points out how we are to reach out and help those who differ from us economically, racially, and religiously. Those who are in need are our neighbors, Luke 10:25-37. Service to them is in Jesus’ name represents God’s love.

Jesus addressed a calamity in Luke 13:4, 5. He pointed out that natural disasters and what are called “accidents” happen without explanation. The world system is sin-cursed due

to the fall of Adam. Death and disaster are our constant companions because of Adam's fall. Continually the affects of sin are played out on the innocent and guilty alike. When asked about those who died at Siloam, Jesus did not brush off the incident but used it as an example, explaining that they were not particularly sinful or evil. What was important for the people to know was that spiritual concerns supercede the need for an explanation. The spiritual implications were paramount to any finger pointing toward a cause for the calamity.

Jesus came to seek those who are lost, Luke 19:10. His primary purpose on earth was to be the substitutionary sacrifice for our sins, Romans 4:24. He accomplished this at Calvary. He arose from the tomb never to die again. He lives in a glorified body. He offers eternal life to all who repent and believe in Him. Jesus' propitiation for our sins is His consummate work. While Jesus was on earth, He provided ethical teaching and practical examples. His ministry and life lay the foundation for all that is done through a Disaster Relief effort. Any Disaster Relief ministry fully representing the Lord Jesus will incorporate an evangelistic element.

The Apostle Paul instructed the early churches concerning their duty within the family of faith as well as outside the church. Galatians 6:10 commands all followers of Jesus to "do good". Simple deeds of kindness fulfill the directives of Scripture. In one particular case, Paul was consumed by the compelling humanitarian crisis of the poor saints of Jerusalem. Deprivation, hunger, even death were facing the members of the Jerusalem church. Paul went to the new church-starts in the Mediterranean area and coordinated a cooperative relief effort. Paul coordinated the unity among co-laborers through his passion to alleviate the situation of the Jerusalem church.

Without fear of contradiction, the Scriptures teach a ministry to those who have suffered. Some of the suffering is due to natural calamity. When we are involved in Disaster Relief, we demonstrate the biblical rational of caring for the unfortunate whether their needs are a result of natural calamities or not.

DISASTER RELIEF MINISTRY THROUGH STATE CONVENTIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS

The Southern Baptist Convention has been recognized as the number three Disaster Relief agency in the United States behind the Red Cross and Salvation Army. Southern Baptist Disaster Relief teams are tremendous first responders to human needs. Considering the polity of Southern Baptists this is a remarkable accomplishment. Churches, as well as local, state and national entities are autonomous. Yet, voluntary cooperation makes Southern Baptist Disaster Relief possible.

Southern Baptists don't operate as Lone Rangers. That is one of the distinctive marks of being a Southern Baptist. It would be improper to insinuate that state conventions or associations act independently of one another, the North American Mission Board of the SBC or other partners. As a part of a voluntary cohesive system, state conventions and associations provide a vital link in the lifeline to those needing assistance.

Churches provide the labor force for the work. Units are usually formed through associational contact. In Texas, because of an unusual circumstance, most associations are comprised of churches from two different conventions. Not surprisingly, the call to minister transcends some of the differences encountered in other areas of associational ministry.

The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention works with associations that will field units affirming the doctrinal position of the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. Because the state convention is a confessional fellowship, all ministries funded by in-state Cooperative Program dollars must affirm the doctrinal statement. Some Disaster Relief units are comprised of members from non-SBTC churches but the units affirm the BF&M 2000.

Partnering through associations is the most desirable avenue of relief work. Associations provide the closest connection to the churches. Positive relationships with the Director of Missions and associational leadership are essential. In some cases a church or a consortium of churches provide a unit. While this is not the ideal, the arrangement still provides quality ministry.

The philosophy of the SBTC Disaster Relief Ministry is more than removing debris or feeding the hungry. The basic purpose is to share Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior so people may come to know Him. By asking volunteers to commit to a doctrinal position that honors the Scriptures and exalts the Savior, the integrity of the witness is verifiable.

Second to uplifting Jesus is the aspect of the Disaster Relief Ministry connection to the local church. Jim Richardson, SBTC Director of Disaster Relief, says it is his belief that all Disaster Relief Ministry is essentially a local Southern Baptist church ministry because the church is the platform where the harvest of the Gospel is gathered.

Richardson added, "I believe that one of the functions of the state convention is to empower, encourage, train, and provide opportunities for local Southern Baptist churches to be successful in their disaster relief ministry efforts." He lists developing a vision, purchasing equipment, training and providing coordination during a disaster as just a few of the vital services provided by a state convention.

The Cooperative Program is the funding engine for Disaster Relief. As in 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9, each church contributes to a common goal with trusted administration disbursing the funds. No other funding mechanism works better than the Cooperative Program. State Conventions provide an over-arching strategy in conjunction with the North American Mission Board. Special gifts play a part in supplying the money, but the Cooperative Program enables all partners a consistent source of revenue.

Southern Baptists are learning to be second and long-term responders as well. After initial needs are met, many organizations such as the Red Cross and Salvation Army leave the affected area. This is not to denigrate the contributions of either of these organizations, but long-term ministry needs extend beyond the initial shock of the first days of disaster.

What about re-build? What about the ongoing emotional and spiritual needs of those who survived the disaster? Southern Baptists are making progress on the learning curve by structuring for the long haul in New Orleans and southeast Texas. Numerous volunteer

builders are willing to go into devastated areas and begin the return to normalcy. Chaplains, youth groups and Mission Service Corp missionaries are being implemented in a re-build effort. As Southern Baptists have become one of the premier Disaster Relief first responders, Southern Baptist will become one of the major contributors in recovery.

The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention is committed to Disaster Relief and Recovery throughout North America and around the world. The International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention asked the SBTC to provide leadership on a relief and rebuild assignment in South Lebanon. Volunteers from all over the Southern Baptist Convention are responding to the call. Eternal impact is being made in the area, by rebuilding, clearing debris and distributing supplies while sharing the Good News.

The One who is honored when Disaster Relief is done correctly is the Lord Jesus. The human hero of this ministry is the common Baptist. The man or woman who is willing to answer the call to touch lives through Disaster Relief is being used of God in an incredible way. State conventions and associations are the most effective vehicles for churches to use in sending their resources to North America and the world.