

CHURCH SPONSORED SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

There was a time when virtually all churches of Christ understood the work of the church to be limited to evangelism, edification, and benevolence.

When some churches began imitating the denominations -- putting kitchens in their buildings, building gymnasiums and "fellowship halls" and sponsoring ball teams -- many preachers and writers for the various journals in the brotherhood spoke out in opposition.

- a. **H. M. Phillips, Gospel Advocate, 6/20/35** -- "When a church has to resort to ball games, feasts, and picnics to keep up interest in the work, it seems that the gospel has lost its power there. Could you imagine Paul at Ephesus as a located preacher having ball games, banquets, and other worldly affairs to keep the men, women, and young people interested in the church? I fear that some are borrowing so much from the denominations that they will be a long time in paying back. Now, as the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, all these things may be power for something, but not for salvation nor of God. If the gospel will not hold people for the Lord, then nothing else will."
- b. **B. C. Goodpasture, Gospel Advocate, 8/1/35** -- "There is a difference between spiritual progress and a religious hurrah, but some people seem not to know it. When a church gets swept up in a religious hurrah of church sponsored youth camps, banquets, ball games, and institutionalism, it would be good to remember Paul's statement, 'The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Rom 14:17)."
- c. **B. C. Goodpasture, Gospel Advocate, 1948, pg. 484** -- "It is not the mission of the church to furnish amusement for the world, or even for its own members. For the church to turn aside from its divine work to furnish amusement and recreation is to pervert its mission. If the church will discharge its duty in preaching the gospel, in edifying its members, and in helping the worthy poor, it will not have desire or the time to amuse and entertain."
- d. **N.B. Hardeman, Hardeman's Tabernacle Sermons, Vol. V, p50, 1942** -- "Again I say unto you, with caution and thought, that it is not the work of the church to furnish entertainment for its members. And yet many churches have drifted into such an effort. They enlarge their basements, put in all kinds of gymnastic apparatus, and make every sort of an appeal to the young people of the congregation. I have never read anything in the Bible that indicated to me that such was a part of the work of the church. I am wholly ignorant of any Scripture that even points in that direction."
- e. **Cleon Lyles, 1949** -- "If you think these remarks sound like an alarmist just look around you and see how many of our own people are advocating the church building 'recreational centers' where our young people can swim in their own swimming pool and listen to their own juke

box, as a means of keeping them in the straight and narrow way. Or see how many have turned to 'pot luck' suppers as a means of teaching rather than the preaching of the gospel. With such a condition the field would be ripe for some fellow who was a failure in some denomination to really become a great leader in the Lord's church. The future will need watching."

- f. **Gospel Advocate Annual Lesson Commentary, 1951, pg. 225-229** -
- "It is not the duty of the church to provide entertainment for young or old. It is not a part of the program of the church to provide playgrounds, programs of entertainment, or supervisors of such programs . . . But it definitely is no more the duty of the church to provide recreation for the young people than it is the duty of the church to provide a business for every member of the church to conduct. . . . Building recreation rooms and providing and supervising recreational activities at the expense of the church is a departure from the simple gospel plan as revealed in the New Testament. The church might as well relieve the parents of feeding and disciplining all the young people at church expense as to take over the job of entertaining and supervising their recreation at church expense. . . . Be sure to get a clear conception of the duties of the home as contrasted with the duties of the church in the matter of recreation. To confuse the two realms of activity will involve us in absurdities."

Now, please understand . . . and please do not misunderstand.

- a. These men were not opposing "incidental" use of the church building or church property.
- ▶ They were not saying it would be wrong for the preacher to take his lunch with him and eat it in his study while he was working on a sermon.
 - ▶ They were not saying it would be wrong for brethren who drive a long distance to get to church services to spread out a picnic lunch under the shade of one of the trees in the church yard and eat and relax as they waited for the hour of the evening worship.
 - ▶ They were not saying it would be wrong for neighborhood children to play kick-ball in the church parking lot.
 - ▶ They were not opposing such "incidental" use of the church's property.
- b. What these men opposed . . . and what I oppose . . . is the church, and the elders of the church, planning and making provision for recreation, amusements, entertainment, and social activities.

But what these men said in opposition to church sponsored social activities fell, for the most part, on deaf ears.

- a. Many churches have made recreation, amusements, and entertainment a part of their work -- and that has contributed to the division that exists in our brother-hood today.

Those men back then were right to oppose church-sponsored social activities; and we are right to oppose church-sponsored social activities today.

- a. There is nothing in the New Testament that either explicitly or implicitly authorizes churches to make recreation, amusements, and entertainment a work of the church.
 - ▶ There is no command that authorizes it; there is no statement that necessarily implies it; and there is no example of 1st century churches doing it with God's approval.
- b. And for churches to act without authority is sin -- **Matt 28:18-19; Col 3:17; 1 Cor 4:6; 2 Jn 9.**

FOUR OBSERVATIONS

1. Recreation, amusements, and entertainment are not part of “the things of God.”

There is a difference between “the things of God” and the “things of men” -- and we have to be able to distinguish between the two.

- a. **Matt 16:23 -- “But He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.’”**

The “things of God” are revealed to us by God.

- a. **1 Cor 2:11 -- “For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so **no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.**”**
- b. Paul goes on to say that the only way we can know “the things of God” is by the Spirit of God revealing them to us.
 - ▶ But the Spirit of God has not revealed to us that social activities ought to be a part of the work of the church.

There is no way to know what God has planned for us except by the Spirit revealing it to us -- in the Scriptures.

- a. There is no way to know what God wants from us, or what God requires of us, except by the Spirit of God revealing it to us -- in the Scriptures.
- b. We cannot know “the things of God” by intuition.
 - ▶ His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts.

2. Recreation, amusements, and entertainment are not part of “godliness.”

1 Tim 4:8 -- “For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.”

- a. In **1 Tim 4:8** Paul talks about recreation (“bodily exercise”) in **contrast** to godliness (spiritual exercise).
 - ▶ Paul does not include “bodily exercise” in “godliness,” but rather he **contrasts** “bodily exercise” and “godliness” -- and that necessarily implies that “bodily exercise” is not a part of “godliness.”

3. Recreation, amusements, and entertainment are not part of “the kingdom of God.”

Rom 14:17 -- “. . . for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

- a. In **1 Cor 8:8** Paul explains why “the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking.”
 - ▶ **1 Cor 8:8** -- “But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better (spiritually, bw), nor if we do not eat are we the worse (spiritually, bw).”
 - NIV: “But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.”
- b. Obviously, Paul could make the same statement about recreation and social activities.
 - ▶ “The kingdom of God is not recreation and social activities, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”
 - ▶ “Because recreation and social activities do not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not do those things, and no better if we do.”
- c. But Paul could not possibly say that about the legitimate work of the church -- evangelism, edification, and benevolence.
 - ▶ He could not say, “The kingdom of God is not evangelism, edification, and benevolence . . .”
 - ▶ And he could not say, “But evangelism, edification, and benevolence do not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not do them, and no better if we do.”

4. Recreation, amusements, and entertainment are not part of “the work of Christ.”

I say that, in the first place, because there is not a single passage in the New Testament that identifies social and recreational activities as “the work of Christ.”

Php 2:30 -- “Receive him (Epaphroditus, bw) therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; 30 because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.”

- a. In **Php 2:30**, Epaphroditus, a faithful servant of God, was willing to die for “the work of Christ” [evangelism, edification, benevolence].

- ▶ A Christian ought to be willing to risk his life to do “the work of Christ” [evangelism, edification, benevolence] but nobody should be willing to die for recreation, amusement, or entertainment.

THREE QUESTIONS

1. Where in the Bible do we find authority for making recreation, amusements, and entertainment a part of the work of the church?

There is Bible authority for making **evangelism** a part of the work of the church.

- a. Php 4:15-16 -- “Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. 16 For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.”
- b. 2 Cor 11:8 -- “I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you.”

There is Bible authority for making **edification** a part of the work of the church.

- a. Eph 4:16 -- “. . . from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”
- b. 1 Cor 14:26 -- “How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.”
- c. Heb 10:24-25 -- “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

There is Bible authority for making **benevolence** a part of the work of the church.

- a. Ac 4:34-35 -- “Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.”
- b. Ac 6:1-3 -- “Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business . . .’”

- c. 1 Tim 5:16 -- “If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.”

But where in the Bible do we find authority for making social activities a part of the work of the church?

- a. Recreation? Amusements? Entertainment?
- b. And remember: Col 3:17; 1 Cor 4:6; 2 Jn 9.

2. If a church can make social activities a part of its *work*, why can't a church make social activities a part of its *worship*?

With no passage to authorize either, how do you include it in the *work* of the church and exclude it from the *worship* of the church?

- a. There is as much authority for the one as there is for the other.

Sometimes the claim is made that “we’re just using these social activities, to get people to come in so we can teach them.”

- a. But, if we can make recreation a part of the *work* of the church to get people to come in so we can teach them, then why can't we make recreation a part of the *worship* of the church to get people to come in so we can teach them?

3. If it is a work of the church, then isn't it true that the church **MUST do it?**

Isn't it true that a church **must** do the work God has given it to do, to the extent of its ability and opportunity?

- a. The church **must** support evangelism -- not **may**, but **must**.
 - ▶ Because evangelism is a work God has given the church to do.
- b. The church **must** edify itself -- not **may**, but **must**.
 - ▶ Because edification is a work God has given the church to do.
- c. The church **must** do benevolent work -- not **may**, but **must**.
 - ▶ Because benevolence is a work God has given the church to do.

But who would argue that the church **must** provide recreation, amusements, and entertainment in order to be pleasing to God?

CONCLUSION

The church is a *spiritual* body with a *spiritual* purpose.

- a. 1 Pet 2:5 -- “. . . you also, as living stones, are being built up a **spiritual house**, a **holy priesthood**, to offer up **spiritual sacrifices** acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”
- b. And we dare not profane God's spiritual house by bringing the secular and social into it.

- ▶ Jn 2:14-17 -- “And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business. 15 When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. 16 And He said to those who sold doves, **‘Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!’** 17 Then His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.’”
- c. There wasn't anything wrong with selling oxen, and sheep, and doves as long as it was done in the right place.
 - ▶ But God's house was set apart for spiritual purposes and it was wrong to bring secular things into God's spiritual house.
- d. And there isn't anything wrong with people engaging in wholesome recreation, amusements, and entertainment -- as long as it isn't brought into the church and made a part of the worship or work of the church.
 - ▶ The church is a *spiritual* body with a *spiritual* purpose.

The church is a *spiritual* army engaged in *spiritual* warfare, trying to free the souls of men from the bondage of sin and Satan.

- a. But “the weapons of our warfare are **not** carnal” (2 Cor 10:5).

As we bring this study to a close, I want you to think about the Lord's warning to the church at Ephesus in the 1st century.

- a. Rev 2:1-5 -- “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, . . . 2 I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. 4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fall-en; **repent and do the first works**, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place -- unless you repent.”

Nearly two thousand years ago, the church of Christ at Ephesus needed to repent and do the first works.

- a. Many “churches of Christ” in the 21st century need to do the same.