

Games Churches Play

We read recently of two large Texas churches involved in a friendly rivalry over the size of their respective bowling alleys. They were also admirably equipped with gymnasiums, jogging tracks, saunas, etc. There is nothing startling about this. Increasingly American churches have begun to take on the atmosphere of health spas, their facilities heavily accented with the smell of sweat and the sound of running feet. Their calendars are filled with social events and entertainment. They no longer aspire merely to be a spiritual refuge for the sinner but the agent of his social life as well. To say that this trend has trivialized churches and brought into their fellowship people attracted by the wrong thing is to speak the obvious. It is also gratuitous to add that many of these churches are made up of those who claim to be undenominational New Testament Christians.

Somehow I have real difficulty envisioning first century churches, in a life and death struggle to save a generation from hell, blithely engaging in building gymnasiums. And the New Testament has certainly not helped my problem, what with the writers' failure to either mention or imply such activity by the churches. Citizens of the Roman Empire were not strangers to recreation, entertainment and physical culture. They loved it. Their children played no less than five different games of ball and the Roman emperors were masters at building public baths and putting on athletic spectacles to keep the mind of the populace off politics.

It certainly was not lack of opportunity or appeal which kept New Testament churches out of athletics and entertainment. The marvel is, given the times, that they did not set up gymnasiums, public baths and banquet houses in every community. It certainly would have improved the public image of a people who were being called "haters of all mankind" (Tacitus). Even the most carnal minds would have been impressed by a program like that. The disciples must have had compelling reasons for their restraint. We believe it had to do with the will of God.

I do not question the relative usefulness of physical exercise and recreation (1 Tim. 4:8). I am even more persuaded of the value of close social ties between Christians (Acts 2:46; Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:1-2). I am in regular association with brethren who will be found encouraging the Lord's people to get to know and appreciate one another through the sharing of life's day-to-day experiences. It is evident that close family ties cannot be cultivated among Christians who only see each other briefly during worship assemblies.

But this does not make me happy about the social and recreational programs of local churches. The burdening of the churches with such activity has served to drain away vital energy and resources needed to accomplish the work God ordained them for (1 Tim. 5:16). The Lord did not commission or equip local assemblies to become social clubs - centers of recreation and entertainment. He did command them to join together in the study of the Scriptures and in worship (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Heb. 10:24-25) in order to produce spiritual maturity in all disciples and train them for service (Eph. 4:11-15).

- by Paul Earnhart

Cookstove Apostasy

The early church prayed in the upper room, the twentieth century church cooks in the supper room. Today, the supper room has taken place of the upper room, play has taken the place of prayer, and feasting the place of fasting. There are more full stomachs than there are bended knees and broken hearts. There is more fire in the range in the kitchen than there is in the pulpit. When you build a fire in the church kitchen, it often puts out the fire in the pulpit. Ice cream chills the fever of spiritual life.

The early Christians were not cooking in the supper room the day the Holy Spirit came, they were praying in the upper room, they were not waiting on tables, they were waiting on God, they were not waiting for the fire from the stove, but for the fire from above. They were detained by the command of God and not entertained by the cunning of men. They were filled with the Holy Ghost, not stuffed with stew and roast.

Oh, I would like the cooking squad put out and the praying band let in, less ham and sham, and more heaven, less pie and more piety, less use for the cook book, and more for the Old Book. Put out the fire in the kitchen and build up the fire in the pulpit.

10 Reasons Why Folks Attend Bible Study:

1. They love the Lord.
2. They love the word, the Bible.
3. They love to study the Bible.
4. They love the Lord's church.
5. They love to see it grow.
6. They love their own souls.
7. They love the souls of others.
8. They love to do good.
9. They love to see souls saved.
10. They love the fellowship of the Lord's people.

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Are You Getting Better?

Here's a challenge for you: Try to find a single place in the Scriptures where the Lord ever encountered a person and encouraged him to stay as he was. You can't do it, can you? The Lord always encouraged people to change; to become better than they previously were.

We know, of course, that some were already morally purer than others. For instance, Cornelius was "a devout man who feared God ... gave alms liberally ... and prayed constantly" (Acts 10:2). But then there were folks like the Corinthians who had been immoral, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, greedy, drunkards, revilers, and robbers (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

But, regardless of their existing condition, they had to change. Why? Paul answered that question for us: "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10).

There are too many people who call themselves Christians who have never gotten serious about making changes and improvements in their lives. They still want to act like they used to act, dress like they used to dress, talk like they used to talk, etc. The heart of the problem may be that we have failed to see ourselves as real sinners. After all, it is reasoned, we aren't nearly as bad as many others in our society.

We need to stop deceiving ourselves by such useless comparisons (2 Cor. 10:12). Unless the stats have changed, it still remains true -- "there is none righteous, no, not one." That being the case, we need to be changing - improving - for the Lord.

- by Greg Gwin