

The Church's Purpose

What is the purpose of the Lord's church? Is it to eradicate poverty, disease, social injustice, illiteracy from among men? Is it to bring about a cessation of war and conflict? Is it to campaign for a temptation-free society for Christians to live in?

If the church had as one of its great goals the eradication of disease, the Lord could have easily equipped it to accomplish that goal. Could not the same power that enabled one blind man to see have enabled all blind men to see; that enabled one lame man to walk have enabled all lame people to walk; that cured many people of varied diseases have cured all people of all diseases? And could not this same power have been given to the church in all generations?

If the church has as one of its great goals the eradication of poverty, the Lord could have easily equipped it to accomplish this purpose. After all, He fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes. He similarly fed four thousand on another occasion. Could not He who did these marvelous works have enabled His church in all generations to feed, clothe, and shelter the impoverished masses of the world through miraculous powers?

If the Lord had wanted His church to become a lobbyist group to apply political pressure toward a temptation and persecution-free society in which to live, He would have given instructions in that direction. He did not even lead His church into a direct effort to destroy slavery, but taught the Christian slave to be a better slave and the Christian master to treat his slaves as he would have his heavenly Master treat him (Col. 3:22-4:1).

The church's purpose is to save souls and prepare people for eternity--It holds out to the impoverished the hope of some day walking a street of gold; to the suffering a time when there will be no pain; to the sorrowing a moment when "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." It tells the tempted and persecuted that there is value in these afflictions, that the testing of their faith is "more precious than of gold," and to rejoice -- It tells all to live godly lives in whatever environment they find themselves. It seeks to change people through the power of the gospel, not society through the coercion of legislators -- Its weapons "are not carnal, but are mighty through God." Its motivating theme: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

When churches become involved in hospital and health clinic work, or when they build schools for the education of their children, or when they see as one of their great missions to provide for the world's poverty, or when they feel obligated to create social upheaval and campaign for human rights, or when they feel called upon to express their views on the government's use of nuclear armaments or whatever, they have a distorted view of the purpose of the church.

- by Bill Hall

Can We Play The Lottery?

The word "covet" is found (in various forms) eighteen times in the Old Testament and twenty-two times in the New Testament. Webster defines covet: "to desire (passionately) [especially, something that another person has]." The Greek meaning of the word is "to fix the desire upon (syn., lust)."

The Christian is bound by the Law of Christ with such passages as Colossians 3:5, "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." The nature of covetousness is the act of idolatry. In this realm, God is not put first but the fleshly desire for wealth. Observe the kind of company covetousness keeps: "Being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers" (Rom. 1:29).

The apostle Paul warns Timothy of what men will become in turning from the Lord: "For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy" (2 Timothy 3:2). To be "lovers of money" is the very nature of covetousness. In Luke 12:16-21, Jesus teaches His disciples that life is not about the things we

possess. "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (v. 15).

The true danger of covetousness is that a person will lose their soul and be damned to hell for it. Paul speaks very plainly when he describes those who will not be saved: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9-10). Consider again Paul's words, "For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God" (Eph. 5:5).

The lottery is very popular in our culture and has caused a lot of people to spend millions of dollars trying to win an elusive prize. For the Christian, the money is not the problem, rather the heart that desires the riches of this world. Playing the lottery is the sin of covetousness and the Lord reminds us that covetousness will damn a soul to Hell. "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him" (Luke 16:13-14). Will you also deride the Lord Jesus Christ by playing the Lottery? "But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints" (Eph. 5:3).

- by **Kent E. Heaton, Sr.**

Church Discipline Works!

The scriptures plainly teach the concept of church discipline. "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed" (2 Thess. 3:14). ". . . with such an one no not to eat" (1 Cor. 5:11).

There are always those who complain that this discipline will not work. "It drives people away," they claim. And, because they do not believe the process will work, they often refuse to participate in it - continuing to freely associate with the one who has been withdrawn from. Sometimes they will even openly oppose the disciplinary action and work against it.

Wait a minute! Who are these people arguing with anyway? Not with us! They are arguing with God! These folks need to be taught, and the teaching needs to begin with the very basic concept of faith in God's word and confidence in His plan.

The truth of the matter is that church discipline, when properly administered does work. In fact, when done correctly, it always works! 1 Corinthians 5 serves as an interesting study of the benefits of church discipline. Notice how it:

- A) demonstrates to all that sin can not be tolerated (vs. 2)
- B) proves our commitment to God and His will (vs. 4)
- C) shows the erring brother that we love him and are concerned for his soul (vs. 5)
- D) protects the rest of the congregation from a damaging influence (vs. 6-13)

If anyone still doubts the effectiveness of this approach, please note that the actions described in the text above had the desired effect - the erring brother was restored! (2 Cor. 2:4-8). This is God's plan, and it works. We must have enough faith to employ it.

- by **Greg Gwin**