

Changing the Mission of the Church

Charles Paul Conn tells of living in Atlanta several years ago. He'd noticed a listing in the Yellow Pages for a restaurant called Church of God Grill. Out of curiosity he dialed the number. Conn recalls the phone conversation as follows:

A man answered with a cheery, *"Hello! Church of God Grill!" I asked how his restaurant had been given such an unusual name, and he told me: "Well, we had a little mission down here, and we started selling chicken dinners after church on Sunday to help pay the bills. Well, people liked the chicken, and we did such a good business, that eventually we cut back on the church service. After a while we just closed down the church altogether and kept on serving the chicken dinners. We kept the name we started with, and that's Church of God Grill."*

While this may be an extreme example, the Church of God Grill is not much different from what a lot of other churches have done in drifting away from God's purpose for the church. Examples could be multiplied of churches that are mainly in the business of providing day care, or health care, or shelter for the homeless, or recreation for their members, or civic service for their community. Apparently, many (if not most) think that it is the mission of the church to meet every real and perceived human need and desire - that somehow Christ died so we can have a basketball team, potluck dinners and a Christian singles dating service.

If we just took the Scriptures and tried to determine what the purpose and mission of the church is, what conclusion would we reach? Notice what the church did or was to do in the following passages:

The church supported the truth. 1 Timothy 3:15 speaks of "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

The church spread the gospel. To the church at Thessalonica Paul wrote, "For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything" (1 Thessalonians 1:8).

The church supported preachers to preach the gospel. The apostle Paul commended the Philippian church in Philippians 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. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities." Elsewhere he said that he took "wages" from churches to minister the gospel (2 Corinthians 11:8).

The church edified itself (built itself up) through worship and teaching. Ephesians 4:15-16 informs us that when members speak the "truth in love" and do their part in the work, it "causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love." When it comes to the worship assembly, Paul commands in 1 Corinthians 14:26 "Let all things be done for edification." Notice that he didn't mention anything being done for entertainment!

The church helped truly needy saints. Clearly the New Testament church was not the worldwide relief organization that modern men have made their churches out to be. The church helped some of its own needy (cf. Romans 15:26), but it was not charged with the mission of helping even all of them. In 1 Timothy 5:16, the Scripture says, "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."

Can we not see that the church has a mission that is spiritual? Her purpose has been determined by the One who built her and gave His life for her! Making money by selling chicken dinners may be a fine endeavor for an individual to take on, but it is NOT the mission of the church! May the path of the church here ever be guided by the question, "Is this what God wants us to do?"

- by Steve Klein

The Only Ones Going To Heaven

"I've heard that you 'Church of Christ' people think that you are the only ones going to

heaven. Is that really true?"

We are often asked this question, and we appreciate the opportunity to explain what we believe. Would you please give careful consideration to these simple points from the Bible?

1) It is important to remember that God is the judge of eternal things. Our personal opinions do not matter. What you think, what we think, what some religious denomination teaches -- none of this matters. In fact, Jesus said that many who think they are saved will be lost in the last day (Matthew 7:13-14, 21-23). The Scriptures will be the exclusive standard of judgment in the last day (John 12:48).

2) The New Testament clearly teaches who will be saved. It describes a simple 'plan of salvation' that any accountable person can understand and obey. We must hear the truth (Rom 10:17), believe the truth (Hebrews 11:6), repent of our sins (Luke 13:3), confess our faith in Jesus (Romans 10:10), and be baptized for remission of sins (Acts 2:38). If we remain faithful, we are promised a reward in heaven (Revelation 2:10). This is not a human dogma or creed. It is the plain and simple teaching of God's Word. If a person obeys these commands they will be saved. If they do not, they will be lost. It is just that simple. The only ones going to heaven are the ones who submit to God's will and obey His commands.

3) Now, where does the church of Christ figure into all of this? Acts 2:47 tells us that those who are saved are added to the church by the Lord. When you do what you must do to be saved (see point #2) then you are automatically added to that church which you read about in the Bible. This is not some man-made denomination. It is the church that belongs to Jesus -- it is the "church of Christ" (Romans 16:16).

Therefore, the answer is yes -- you must be a member of that church to go to heaven. Do you see it?

- by Greg Gwin