

Should the Church Provide Social Meals and Recreation?

It may come as a surprise, especially to younger readers, that many of the social works churches engage in (recreational teams sponsored, plays and pageants, day-care centers, retreats, showers and teas, physical exercise classes, providing walking tracks, gymnasiums, financial counseling, etc.) are of very recent origin. The fact that something is of recent origin does not necessarily make it unscriptural, but this is mentioned due to the fact that there was practically universal rejection of these practices among churches of Christ as little as fifty to fifty-five years ago.

In 1951, B.C. Goodpasture was editor of the Gospel Advocate, a periodical written and published by a number of gospel preachers. The Advocate published the Gospel Advocate Annual Lesson Commentary primarily written with Bible teachers in mind. In that book, bro. Goodpasture wrote:

"It is not the mission of the church to furnish amusement for the world or even for its own members. Innocent amusement in proper proportion has its place in the life of all normal persons but it is not the business of the church to furnish it...The church was not established to feature athletics.. For the church to turn aside from its divine work to furnish amusement and recreation is to pervert its mission. It is to degrade its mission. .. 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 of the young people at church expense as to take over the job of entertaining and supervising the recreation at church expense" (page 229).

It is interesting that most churches claiming to be "of Christ" that build, maintain, and fund these social works now are strong supporters of the Advocate. Obviously, changes came along the way. We are not arguing that because something is of recent origin it is unscriptural, we are simply calling attention to the fact that brethren have changed, and that what now is considered common was universally and vehemently opposed by gospel preachers and a leading journal among Christians only fifty years ago.

At some point, Christians changed in their thinking and believed it was scriptural to take money contributed to the church for its work, to construct buildings which included kitchens and large dining rooms, commonly called "fellowship halls." These were not built to feed needy saints, but to provide social functions for well-fed Christians. Whereas the primary work of the church is to preach the gospel (I Tim. 3:15; I Thess. 1:8), edify saints through teaching (I Tim. 3:15; Eph. 4:11-16), and take care of its own indigent members (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; 6:1-6; 11:27-30; Rom. 15:25, 26; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; II Cor. 8-9), a philosophy known as the "social gospel" began to be prominent in the latter half of the Twentieth Century, emphasizing an ideal social order that is believed to be achieved by solving social problems. Rather than emphasizing the need for salvation from sins and things eternal, a shift in thinking came that prompted brethren to expend the churches' resources and funds in solving economic, health, and other social related issues. Catering to the needs of the "whole man," churches began providing childcare, entertainment, "mothers day out," etc.

Therefore, the issue is not whether or not brethren should enjoy meals and recreational times together; rather it is a question of authority. Does the New Testament give Divine authority for churches to provide for these things from their treasuries? Keep in mind that Jesus said, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name east out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work lawlessness" (Matt. 7:22-23). "Lawless" works are those for which there is no divine authority, no "law" from God that would authorize their practice. Though some may think they are "helpful" and that they "do good," if something is not authorized; one goes beyond the doctrine of Christ and has not God when he engages in its practice (II John 9).

- by Phillip Owens

Never Give Up

Sometimes in this old world, we may begin to sense that we are being overwhelmed and that we are helpless in our attempt to call men back to God and to his eternal will. Let me encourage all of us to remember some basic truths that should motivate us:

1) God is still God! He has not left us; He has not changed! His blessings, expectations, promises and warnings remain firm.

2) It is not our job to force people to accept the truth, but, rather, it is our task to keep preaching the truth. The only way that truth is ineffective is if we allow the world to silence the voice of righteousness, or we begin to timidly question it. God demands loving but fearless messengers.

3) Make up your mind that no matter what the world does, you will not compromise with evil. Light dispels darkness. The only way darkness dominates is when we hide our lights. Remember! The Bible still says, go out from their midst, and be separate says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you." (2 Cor. 6:17).

- by Les McGalliard

Two Kinds of Workers

Those who run businesses and hire employees are always in search of the best people to work for them. In fact, finding good people to fill critical roles is one of the most difficult aspects of operating a successful enterprise.

Typically, there are two different kinds of workers. Some are only looking to draw a paycheck. They quickly analyze the job situation, determine the bare minimum that is required, and then apply themselves to insure that they do only enough to maintain the job and avoid being fired.

The other type of employee really wants to do a good job. Their goal is to please the employer and do everything they can to make the business succeed. They will even sacrifice their own personal interests at times in favor of the good of the company. These people are the "cream of the crop," and they are the ones that every boss hopes to find.

In any church you can identify the same two types of workers. Unfortunately, there are those who want to find the minimum amount of work that is necessary. They want to be regarded as "in good standing," but they really don't desire to do any more than is absolutely required. A common question of such folks is this: "Where does the Bible say I have to?" They apply this question to things like Sunday night worship or Wednesday night Bible class. During gospel meetings you need not expect them to be present, because they don't see where the Bible says they "have to." Teach a Bible class? Visit a sick person? Invite a neighbor? Encourage a weak member? Show where the Bible says this is absolutely necessary, and they might consider it - otherwise, no way!

The other type of worker is faithful in all things. In fact, this type of member is not interested in doing the minimum. Such folks want to do all they can to help in the important work of the church. Need a volunteer? Looking for assistance, regardless of the job? Look to these people, for they constitute the working "core" of the congregation. They can be counted on in all situations, even when it involves sacrifice. Without them, the congregation would fail. God bless them!

Which kind of worker are you? Think!

- by Greg Gwin