

Church Issues- Social Works

by Casey Head

Many Christians today are guilty of turning the Lord's church into a social and recreational organization. "Fellowship halls" are constructed for the purpose of facilitating common meals and banquets, while gymnasiums and fitness centers are added onto the church building for recreational purposes. But should the Lord's church be engaging in these various social programs? Is that why the Lord Jesus died on the cross- so that we could play basketball and have chicken dinners?

We need to first of all understand the spiritual nature of the Lord's church. Jesus told Pilate in John 18:36, "My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from here." The point is that the kingdom, or church, is not physical in nature, but rather is devoted to spiritual and heavenly things. To turn the kingdom into a center for recreational and social works is to pervert the nature of the kingdom. Also, in Romans 14:17, "For the kingdom of God is NOT meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Once again, the church of Christ is not in the food and restaurant industry, but instead is devoted to spiritual lessons. The point is powerfully driven home by Paul's admonition in 1 Corinthians 11:22, 34, "What? Have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? Or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not...And if any many hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation." While the context is clearly dealing with the Lord's Supper, we can see that social meals are to be left at home. In other words, we do not come together as a church for social meals! To do so results in our condemnation! Let us maintain the spiritual purpose of the church- teaching the gospel of Christ to the lost and edifying the saints of God.

The words "edification" and "fellowship" are often used by religious people to authorize social and recreational works. They will say that social meals bring Christians together for edification and fellowship. That is why the dining rooms are called "fellowship halls." But if people would simply study their Bible, they would be able to see that these words do not involve social intentions. Let us examine both of these words.

The word "Edification" is used in a spiritual sense and means, "the act of building up; the act of one who promotes another's growth in Christian wisdom, piety, happiness, holiness." Notice how the word "edification" is used in the scriptures. In 1 Corinthians 14, for example, the word is used four times. Paul's point in each verse, and in the chapter, is that when the church comes together, learning and exhortation should occur- a building up of the spirit. See also (2 Cor. 10:8; Eph. 4:28; and 1 Tim 1:4). Which one edifies? A lasagna dinner or a Bible study?

One of the most misunderstood words of the New Testament is "fellowship." Contrary to popular belief, this word, in the Bible, does not denote social or recreational activities. The word means simply, "communion; communication; joint participation," and as with edification, this word is used in a spiritual sense in the word of God. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:9, "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the *fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ* our Lord," and in 10:20 of the same book, "And I would not that ye should have *fellowship with devils*." Do you see that in both verses the word is used spiritually, denoting a spiritual relationship. A perfect passage in dealing with fellowship is 1 John 1:6-7, "If we say that we have *fellowship* with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, *we have fellowship one with another*, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." Those who are faithful to God have a relationship with Him, and as a result have fellowship with other faithful Christians. Clearly, the word fellowship is spiritual in nature, and does not involve fried chicken or basketball.

We have shown in this article the error of incorporating social and recreational works into the spiritual kingdom of Christ. Let us eat common meals with other Christians, but at home and in the community, NOT in the church. Let us remember the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:22, "What? Have ye not houses to eat and to drink in?"