

## God's All-Sufficient Church #2

**Introduction.** The Galatians quickly removed themselves from the gospel of Christ because they had accepted something that was not a part of the true gospel (Galatians 1:6-9). Likewise, there are many perversions of the true gospel today, but probably the most popular is the "social gospel." Instead of using only the gospel to appeal to man's inner being to make him better spiritually, it mainly appeals to man's physical nature.

Many churches of Christ have constructed fellowship halls or family life centers. These are rooms, buildings, or other structures for the purpose of recreation and social functions. Many works are justified by the good that is being done. However, good is defined as how people feel about the work and not by appealing to God's definition of good. Practices are only denied if it is shown that harm is being done. To illustrate this fundamental difference, we are going to look the question of churches zealously providing food and recreation and/or entertainment today, using the principle found in 1 Corinthians 14:33.

### ***I. Can The Church Provide Food?***

#### **A. A historical perspective.**

1. In the transition of American society from a rural-based economy to a more urban, industrialized people, churches faced many changes in their application of scriptural tradition. The Sunday evening service was one of those changes. City churches, comprised of factory workers and support staff, had to make provisions for members who could not attend the usual Sunday morning worship period.
2. In the rural economy, churches would assemble for a morning service. Many families would bring their lunches to spread out, picnic style, outside the meeting house. After dinner, there would often be a period of play preceding an occasional singing followed by an evening worship period. As many had come some distance for this Lord's day gathering with the saints, the afternoon services would conclude with plenty of day left for safe travel home and evening chores. Several factors being considered, the meeting house of the church would, of necessity, be used to accomplish all of the day's activities. From these austere beginnings evolved the modern-day practice of building kitchens, banquet rooms, community meeting rooms, athletic fields, and the ever-popular family life center.

#### **B. Common arguments.**

1. "It is a part of our duty to provide fellowship for the members."
  - a) Some seek to include "fellowship" as a work of the church, and, based on that assumption, the "hall" would then be scriptural.
    - (1) They say that if elders and preachers do not provide the entertainment for the church member's children, then the devil's crowd will.
    - (2) This really sells people's faith short. Do brethren really believe that our young people are so weak that they cannot be faithful without the social gospel?

- b) However, fellowship is never used in the scriptures to describe social activity. Those in fellowship often eat together, but eating together is not fellowship; it is socializing.
    - (1) Fellowship is having something in common, something shared; it is a relationship between two people (1 John 1:3-4, 7). It is always used to describe the relationship Christians share uniquely with one another as Christians. The church cannot provide fellowship; it can encourage its members to be in fellowship.
      - (a) Jesus died on the cross to bring spiritual fellowship, not to bring people together to drink coffee and to eat donuts.
      - (b) The only meal that the New Testament describes as “fellowship” is the Lord’s Supper (cp. 1 Corinthians 10:16). That is the meaning of “communion.” Every meal that Christians eat together is not “fellowship.” Sharing a social meal is not a spiritual activity Christians share uniquely as Christians.
    - (2) If fellowship is socializing, then what about these different kinds of activities?
      - (a) Super Bowl party.
      - (b) Piano recital.
      - (c) A play by Shakespeare.
      - (d) Golf course.
      - (e) Movie theater.
    - (3) If this is a work of the church, where is the passage that requires a church to provide eating facilities?
      - (a) The work of the church is completely centered around spreading the gospel of Christ. Our one and only mission is the salvation of souls. To that end we preach, both to the lost (Mark 16:15) and to those who are saved for their growing in the Lord (2 Peter 3:18).
        - i) The church provides Bible classes for all ages so that we feed on spiritual food and grow spiritually (Acts 17:1-2; 18:4; 19:9).
        - ii) When Paul told the elders to “feed” the flock in Acts 20:28, to what kind of food was he referring? Food and drink are part of the home, not part of the kingdom (Romans 14:17).
      - (b) We come together to worship God and admonish each other to press on in our common faith (Hebrews 10:24).
        - i) When it becomes necessary to help a brother or sister so that he or she can carry on their life as a functioning part of the working family, the church is authorized and commanded to assist in his or her relief (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35).
        - ii) Fellowship enters into this effort when we, collectively, accept the charge of scripture to engage in a congregational work with all of its biblical limitations (Acts 11:27-30; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2).
2. “There is nothing against using the building for a common meal in the scriptures.”
- a) This amounts to asking the question, “Why not?” However, God has revealed all that we should do. He has not stated everything we should

not do. We can see in the New Testament why brethren assembled and a social meal was never included!

- (1) The church met for worship (Acts 2:42).
  - (2) The church met for prayer (Acts 4:31).
  - (3) The church met to arrange benevolence (Acts 6:1-6).
  - (4) The church met for preaching (Acts 11:26).
  - (5) The church met for an evangelism report (Acts 14:27).
  - (6) The church met to discuss doctrinal problems (Acts 15:1-4).
  - (7) The church met to observe the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7).
  - (8) The church met for discipline (1 Corinthians 5:1-5).
- b) The Corinthians had misused the Lord's Supper, coming together to eat instead of worship, thereby violating the will of God (1 Corinthians 11:17-34).
- (1) Paul's solution was not to wait until after the worship service. His solution was not to use the building on another day. His solution was not to build a separate facility for meals. He told the Corinthians to have their meals in their homes. It is interesting to note that the only time a church social meal is mentioned in the Bible, it is condemned!
  - (2) Paul is giving a general rule that condemns the specific circumstance in Corinth. This approach is used several times in the scriptures (Matthew 15:13; 1 Timothy 5:8; Hebrews 10:26; 2 John 7-9).
  - (3) Jesus did not approve of the people who were seeking Him to obtain food (John 6:26-27). One lady said that she would not let her children ride on the "church" bus anymore because she said it was too hard on her children's teeth. The brethren were offering candy to entice children to ride on their bus to services.
3. "We do not have authority for a building, so we can do what we want with it."
- a) If a building is not authorized, then no church should have one (Colossians 3:17).
    - (1) Having a building without authority would imply adding to God's word, which would be sinful.
    - (2) So the reasoning is, "We are sinning already, so we can commit additional sins without further harm." Is this a proper attitude to have?
  - b) However, the premise is false. We do have authority for a building.
    - (1) We are commanded to assemble (1 Corinthians 11:18; 16:1-2; Hebrews 10:25; James 2:2).
      - (a) None of these examples show that a building was purchased, but they have one point in common: they had a place to assemble.
      - (b) Therefore, the authority to assemble includes the provision of a place to assemble.
    - (2) Brethren usually purchase a building because it is cheaper than renting a facility and provides a stable location. This method satisfies the command with good stewardship.
  - c) This building was purchased and built for the purpose of worshiping God and teaching His word.

- (1) If we want to use the building for any other purpose, we must first show that God authorizes it.
  - (a) Authority to assemble includes everything incidental to our assembling: rest rooms, drinking fountains, lights, air-conditioning systems, etc.
  - (b) When we baptize someone, we know that water is essential and a baptistry is an expedient. No scripture, though, can be produced to show authority for social meals. Social meals are not expedients.
- (2) Although brethren may say that they are using dinners to attract non-Christians, the ends will never justify the means (Romans 3:8). If the ends do justify the means, then why did this not this work with Uzzah (1 Chronicles 13:7-10)?
- 4. "The Bible uses the term 'feasts of charity' which means a fellowship meal."
  - a) The term "feasts of charity" is used in Jude 12. The problem is we do not know enough about these to say if they were fellowship meals. There are several possibilities as to its identification.
    - (1) A figurative meal (cp. 1 Corinthians 5:8).
    - (2) The Lord's Supper.
    - (3) A benevolent meal for the poor.
    - (4) Sharing meals from house to house (Acts 2:46).
  - b) Whatever it was, there was no evidence that they were done within a church assembly nor was there any evidence that church funds were used for these feasts. In fact, the word "church" is not even in the book of Jude.

## **II. Can The Church Provide Recreation?**

- A. It is not the mission of the church.
  - 1. Jesus did not come to entertain (Luke 19:10). The gospel is God's power to save (Romans 1:16).
  - 2. Because of this fact, the church has a limited mission: evangelism (1 Timothy 3:15), edification (Ephesians 4:16), and benevolence (1 Timothy 5:16).
  - 3. Therefore, the church of our Lord has a spiritual function (Luke 17:21; John 18:36).
- B. There is no authority for it.
  - 1. We have to respect the silence of the scriptures (1 Peter 4:11; 2 John 9-11).
    - a) To teach something as though it came from the scriptures is adding to the word (Revelation 22:18).
    - b) The Israelites trusted that if they did it God's way, it would accomplish the divinely intended results (Hebrews 11:30).
  - 2. Some say, "It is not expressly forbidden."
    - a) They are looking for: "The church CANNOT provide recreation and entertainment."
    - b) Again, the Lord only stated what He wanted, not everything He does not want. The assumption that we can do whatever is not expressly forbidden opens the doors for anything under the sun.

- C. It makes no distinction between the holy and the profane.
  - 1. The priests were condemned in Ezekiel 22:26 for profaning what was holy of God. The church providing recreation and entertainment is “common” or “profane” and cannot be part of the work and worship of the church.
  - 2. The church does have a “business” (Acts 6:3). We have already discussed the mission of the church in a previous point.
    - a) As we saw in our previous point, Paul distinguished between social and spiritual matters (1 Corinthians 11:22, 34).
    - b) Foot washing belongs to the social affairs of the home (1 Timothy 5:10). Likewise, this is where recreation and entertainment belong.
- D. It leads away from spirituality.
  - 1. It substitutes food for the stomach for food for the soul, and fun and frolic for meditation and prayer
  - 2. Someone once wrote, “If you win them on a hotdog, you’ve got to keep them on a steak” (Philippians 3:19; 2 Timothy 3:4).
  - 3. The entertainment projects go over big for a time, but in the end, they introduce worldliness into the church (1 John 2:15).

**Conclusion.** Perversions of the gospel will not save men’s souls, but will condemn them. On a cold winter day in 1986, Diane Elstroth entered a store in Bronxville, New York looking for something to relieve her pain. She bought a bottle of medicine, not knowing that someone had opened the bottle’s tamper-resistant wrapping, tainted the capsules with cyanide and returned them to the store’s shelf. Within a short time after Elstroth left the store, the cyanide-laced capsules killed her.

Like a medicine mixed with cyanide, a perverted gospel brings condemnation rather than making us whole. Stick to the authority we have for a spiritual house with a spiritual work and we will walk by faith. Venture into other waters and you will digress.