

# FELLOWSHIP, THE CHURCH, AND THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

## Introduction

- 1) **Matthew 16:18** – the church was built by Christ; it belongs to Him and is constructed according to His divine wisdom
- 2) To know the truth concerning the identity and work of the church that belongs to Christ, we must consult the word of Christ (the gospel, New Testament)
  - a) To know the identity and work of churches and denominations founded and directed by men, we must consult the words of men (creeds, catechisms, disciplines)
- 3) As Christians, we must be careful to do only that which Christ has authorized in His word concerning the work and worship of the church of Christ (Col. 3:17) and call all men to be saved and united in Christ and His church (1 Cor. 1:9-10)!
- 4) In doing this, we must be ever vigilant to avoid any teaching or activity that would go beyond and transgress the doctrine of Christ concerning His body, the church (2 Jn. 9)

## I) ESTABLISHING BIBLE AUTHORITY

- A) Having Bible authority is important to pleasing God and doing His will (Matt. 7:21)
- B) How we learn what God has authorized:
  - 1) Divine commands/statements (telling)
  - 2) Approved apostolic examples (showing)
  - 3) Necessary implications (implying)
- C) We must **not** do or teach something in religion simply because it “sounds good,” “seems religious,” “feels right,” “the way we’ve always done it,” “gets the people to come,” etc.

## II) THE CHURCH: UNIVERSAL AND LOCAL

- A) The church in the universal sense includes all who are saved in Christ (Eph. 1:22)
  - 1) The church universal has no divine organization or work
- B) The church in the local sense includes Christians in a given locality (Col. 1:2)
  - 1) Organized in the fullest sense with elders and deacons (Phil. 1:1)
  - 2) Local congregations accomplishing the Lord’s work independently and autonomously

## III) THE DIVINELY-ORDAINED WORK OF THE CHURCH

- A) ***Evangelism*** – preach the saving gospel to the lost (1 Thess. 1:8)
- B) ***Benevolence*** – care of needy brethren (Acts 4:34-35; Rom. 15:26-27)
- C) ***Edification*** – teaching/building up of the church (Eph. 4:16; Acts 20:7, 32)
- D) ***Worship*** – assembling to reverence God in acts of worship (Heb. 10:25; 1 Cor. 11:20)
- E) Spiritual fellowship and participation is enjoyed in all these areas among those in Christ

## IV) CHURCH VS INDIVIDUAL ACTION

- A) There is a difference described in scripture between the church’s collective work and a Christian acting as an individual (1 Tim. 5:8, 16)
- B) The context of instruction helps us understand church vs individual responsibility (Gal. 6:10)

## V) ARE SOCIAL ACTIVITIES A PART OF THE WORK OF THE NT CHURCH?

- A) This has been called the “social gospel”
  - 1) Historically, in the general religious world, this arose in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with churches becoming involved in such movements as labor reform, women’s suffrage, prohibition, YMCA, racial equality, poverty, etc.

- 2) In more recent times, it is the funding and participation in social and recreational activities as part of the work of church (funded from the treasury of church)
- B) This came to involve such things as:
  - 1) Sporting activities (gymnasiums)
  - 2) Social meals and parties (kitchens, fellowship halls/family life centers)
  - 3) General community social outreach efforts (food pantries, bake sales, trunk-or-treat)
- C) God has **not** authorized His church to sponsor and engage in these “social gospel” efforts
  - 1) Opposition to church funded social and recreation activities and their facilities is not due to
    - a) not liking to have fun
    - b) a lack of funds or workers
    - c) wanting to be different
    - d) just our preference
      - i) In fact, individuals are encouraged to enjoy the social and recreational things of this world that are godly and moral and when and where appropriate (cf. Mk. 6:31)
  - 2) **No** NT command/example/implication (see “Church-Sponsored Social Meals?” below)
  - 3) The spiritual fellowship of God’s church and work is a distinct and higher priority from our individual earthly relationships and activities (see “Biblical fellowship” below)
    - a) Earthly activities and institutions involving secular education, medical needs, recreation, banking, etc., are all part of one’s individual responsibilities in life
  - 4) Since God has **not** authorized the church to sponsor such activities, one cannot assume it is alright to do so in His name – such would be presumptuous and sinful (Col. 3:17; 2 Jn. 9)
    - a) Remember David’s “new cart” to transport the ark of the covenant (1 Chron. 13, 15)

### Conclusion

The conclusion of the matter remains that there is no Biblical authority for a church to plan and provide materially for social activities that would involve sports, eating common social meals, or community social outreach. And if there was, every church would be obligated to do so. Yet, we do not see NT churches involved in such activities under the divine revelation and guidance of the Holy Spirit through the apostles. Let the church today do the work God gave it to do!

### **Extras:**

#### ***Biblical Fellowship***

- 1 – communion with Deity (1 Jn. 1:3,6,7; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 13:14)
  - 2 – communion with the saints in Christ (1 Jn. 1:3)
  - 3 – communion with Christ in the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 10:16)
  - 4 – sharing in suffering for Christ (2 Cor. 1:6-7; Phil. 3:10)
  - 5 – partnership in the work and worship of the Lord in the church (Acts 2:42; 2 Cor. 8:23)
  - 6 – partnership in financing the Lord's work (Acts 2:42; 1 Tim. 6:18)
  - 7 – partnership in preaching the gospel by supporting a preacher (Phil. 1:5; 4:15)
  - 8 – distributing to the needs of the saints (Rom. 12:13; 15:26-27; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13; Heb. 13:16)
- \*Not once in the entire Bible does "fellowship" refer to a common meal or recreational entertainment  
(Jeff Asher, [www.padfield.com/2002/church-social-meals](http://www.padfield.com/2002/church-social-meals))

#### ***Church-Sponsored Social Meals?***

- Acts 2:42 – “breaking of bread” = Lord’s Supper in context with other acts of worship  
 Acts 2:46 – “breaking bread” = common meals among individual brethren from house to house  
 Acts 20:7 – “break bread” = Lord’s Supper as the reason for coming together on first day of week  
 Acts 20:11 – “broken bread and eaten” = Paul himself eating common meal after midnight  
 1 Cor. 11:20-22, 34 – “own supper” vs. Lord’s Supper; houses to eat and drink in, told to eat at home  
 2 Pet. 2:13; Jude 12 – exact identity unknown, could be Lord’s Supper to a common meal at home

\*No evidence or authority for church sponsored social and recreational activities\*