

WHAT THE CHURCH IS NOT

One of the greatest challenges facing brethren today is keeping the church pure. Try as hard as we may, it always seems that something gets through, and sits right under our noses for periods of time, until someone notices it.

I remember a guy down south saying, “Copperheads are the kind of snakes that can sneak into your house and be there for a long time before they get noticed.” What a frightening thought! So is it with sinful ideas that come into the church!

Awareness of the nature of the church as Jesus designed it is essential. We need to appreciate the local church of Christ as it is revealed in the Bible, be content with it.

A somewhat different task is to raise warning flags from another perspective, regarding what the church is NOT. Because this task is not consistently undertaken, there is confusion in some quarters. We must respect what the church is NOT. The church has primarily spiritual responsibilities. It has the task of causing the gospel to be proclaimed, Acts 13. The church is to edify Christians, Eph. 4:11-13. The responsibility of the church in temporal matters is to tend to the needs of indigent members of the church, as it did in Acts 6.

If an activity or work is not legitimately located in one of these three areas, it is not appropriate for the church of Christ. With these considerations before us, consider what the church is NOT.

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS NOT A DEMOCRACY

Democracy is government “by the people... in which the supreme power is retained by the people.” Democratic governments inspire such sentiments as “one man one vote,” et al. The church, bought and built by Jesus at the price of His blood, is evidently a kingdom. Christ is the king, and His decrees are expressed on the pages of the New Testament, 2 John 9.

Our especial concern here, however, is of the church in the local sense, and it is in this realm that some think they find democratic rule. They do not. Doctrinally, the local church is directed by the teaching of Christ. The elders of a local church, those who “are over you in the Lord” (1 Thess. 5:12) are not legislators. They do, however, have the responsibility of leading the flock, of guarding the flock, and this they must diligently do. In connection with this they are to be “not domineering over those in” their charge, 1 Pet. 5:3. Decisions in temporal matters are to be made by the bishops (elders). They may and should consult the members as to their wishes in some particular matters, but when decision time comes they must do what they deem BEST, not most popular. It does not matter if their decision is contrary to the wishes of a few, or of many: it is to One they “will have to give an account” (Heb. 13:12) and they must act in accord with that.

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS NOT A POLITICAL ENTITY

Questions with moral implications – wet-dry elections, abortion “rights,” et al – occasionally get “on the ballot” and churches (usually, through their preachers) are sorely tempted to weigh in on the side of truth and right. It is appropriate for every Christian to make his/her voice heard in every legitimate way possible, in such matters: but they do this as individuals, not as a collective. It is not the work of the church to bring influence to bear on behalf of this issue or in opposition to that one. This is said in full recollection of candidates holding forth in various pulpits on behalf of their election. It does not matter that many do it – many do many things for which they have no authority – it is WRONG, and that body whose Head is Jesus will shun such.

It is not that moral/political questions under consideration are unimportant; it is rather that the matters for which the church is to expend its energy are indefinitely more important.

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS NOT A SECULAR SCHOOL

The church is to be involved in edification, spiritual building up. This certainly involves the imparting of information; but the information to be imparted is spiritual. It is by the word of God that edification is accomplished, the growth in grace and knowledge of its members. It is no rare thing today to see churches involved in the provision of secular education all the way through high school. There are many things that can be said to commend such arrangements; but the one thing that CANNOT be said is, "this is what Jesus died for." It is fine for young people to be taught "reading 'writing and 'arithmetic;" but that is a responsibility of the family, not of the church. The preeminent concern must be for the wisdom that is eternal, Eph. 5:17, "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS NOT A RECREATIONAL CENTER

Young folk – and most older ones, too – love recreation. Playing ball, camping, taking field trips, exercising: these are a sampling of good things identified as recreation, and everyone should be participating in them. Parents should make deliberate efforts to provide such for their children, and for themselves. As we have seen in other areas, this is NOT, however, work the church is to be involved in. It is misappropriation for the local church to use its resources in such things. Recreation is a family matter.

Conclusion: Many human institutions are created for particular works, and no one THINKS it strange if they do not allow themselves to be diverted. Why can men not have at least equal respect for the purpose of the Head of the church?

-Pat Farish, Abundant Life, Vol. 39, Number 12