

Practice makes perfect:

“Men acquire a particular quality by constantly acting a particular way... you become just by performing just actions, temperate by performing temperate actions, brave by performing brave actions.”



NOVEMBER 28, 2010

What the Church Is NOT
by Pat Farish

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

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Worship Services 10:20AM & 6:00PM
Wednesday - Bible Classes 7:00PM

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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 REC 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?

Centered on Self

A denominational commentator wrote: “The Bible is set in a specific time and culture, not a book to be put in the hands of some fundamentalist preacher who applies it literally to the complex problems of our society.” Do you see it? He is claiming that our situation is much more difficult than that of the people whose history is recorded in the Bible. Ours, he says, is a more ‘complex’ time than theirs, and thus the Bible cannot be expected to adequately deal with the issues of our time.

Unfortunately, we have become and self-centered people. How common it is for us to imagine that our problems, our suffering and our troubles are worse and more complicated than those faced by others. This attitude is clearly seen in this commentator’s foolish remarks.

It would be most interesting to listen as a 21st Century Christian explained the ‘complexities’ of his life to a persecuted Christian of the 1st Century. While he sits at ease with all the latest conveniences in his comfortable modern home, he could try to tell one of those disciples who was “scattered abroad” from Jerusalem (Acts 8:4) just how tough it is to live in 21st Century America. Or he could list his ‘problems’ to some of God’s people who “were stoned, sawn asunder, tempted and slain with the sword” (Hebrews 11:37).

Do you see our point? It is so easy to assume that our own troubles are the most challenging ever faced. We all do this from time to time. When this happens, it would do us some good to stop and consider the terrible trials that others have faced throughout the centuries. For that matter, it would be helpful to remember the difficulties faced by many who are living in the world today.

Stop fretting and complaining. Stop thinking that your problems are the worst ever faced. Stop being so self-centered. Remember others, living and dead, who have faced harder things. Be grateful for your blessings. And develop Paul’s mindset: ‘I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me’ (Philippians 4:13)

by Greg Gwin