

Are You Tired Of All The Gimmicks?

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People should be insulted by all the gimmicks that churches are offering to draw and to keep them. Most of it is directed toward families, the children in particular. I speak of all the secular, non-religious, non-spiritual gimmicks -- the picnics, luncheons and suppers, the parties, the sports teams, the fun and games, the square dances, the clubs and socials, the diet and exercise classes, and the fund-raising dinners and bazaars offered by churches. Classes and services that used to be purely religious are given new appearances with gimmickry.

Don't the people realize that the churches are saying, in effect, "We know that purely spiritual or religious activities and services, involving worshipping God, teaching and learning His word, edifying and being edified spiritually, are not enough to draw and to keep you. Therefore, we are featuring all these other secular activities in which you are probably more interested and adding a little religion to them and calling them 'Christian fellowship.' We're willing to compromise what God has instructed churches to be doing in order to get our crowd."?

So churches cease to be churches and become more like social, recreational, athletic, health, craft clubs. Conservative churches of Christ do not resort to gimmickry. We are trying to be like the churches you read about in the New Testament, not the churches around us.

Christians have God-given work to do, both individually and collectively. While there is much overlap, passages such as 1 Timothy 5:16 clearly indicate a difference between the two. What does the Bible teach about our collective work?

Spiritual

First, the Bible teaches that the nature of the work of the church is spiritual, not secular. God ordained specific tasks for churches to perform. First-century congregations:

- **Preached the gospel at home and abroad** (1 Th. 1:8). This was done through instruction given in worship assemblies (1 Cor. 14:24-25), by people talking to those with whom they had contact (Acts 8:4), and by sending men out to preach (Phil 4:15 -16).
- **Built up the members of the congregation.** Everything done in worship was to be unto edification (1 Cor. 14:26). Elders, the spiritual shepherds, were charged with feeding the flock (Acts 20:28). Even severing association with some was an act of seeking to restore the erring (1 Cor. 5).
- **Provided for needy brethren, either at home or abroad** (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Rom. 15:26). This third area, unlike the others, was not necessarily ongoing, but as needed. Since the church is a spiritual relationship, it is no surprise that its work is in the spiritual realm. So much of what modern churches do is conspicuously absent from the pages of the New Testament. The Bible makes no reference to churches operating schools or day care centers, providing recreational facilities and opportunities, being in the health care business, being a source for counseling and all sorts of social services, or even being a general charity. The fact that something seems like a good thing to us is no justification for altering God's plan. Neither do we have any right to employ carnal means to attract more people. See John 6 for the result.

Equipped

The Bible teaches that Christ equipped the church to accomplish everything He wants it to do. *“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ”* (Eph. 3:11-12).

God's provisions are simple, yet sufficient. It is only when we try to involve the church in an unauthorized activity that we find our resources or organization inadequate. Make no mistake: any argument that says we must go beyond the New Testament model for churches in order to be effective is a denial of the sufficiency of God's design!

Independent

The Bible teaches that each church governs itself, planning and executing its own work in keeping with Christ's directions. Elders' oversight is limited to the flock among them (1 Pet. 5:2).

No New Testament church ever directed the work of another, wholly or in part. None ever planned a work beyond its ability to carry out. Each did what it could.

No New Testament church ever paid a human institution to do its work for it. There were no add-on organizations, no subsidiary “ministries,” no missionary boards or societies.

God has given the church work to do. However, let's make sure that we are busy doing God's work in God's way.