

THE LOCAL CHURCH IS NOT...

Because of the influence exerted by the churches of men, many do not understand the true purpose of the local church. Instead, they have been led to believe that local churches are community social clubs, entertainment centers, teenage hangouts, and personal ATM's. Somewhere in all of this modern misunderstanding, the true purpose of the local church gets lost. And that purpose is simply this: saving the lost (1Cor.14:23-25), edifying the saints (1Cor.14:26), worshiping God (1Cor.11:23-26), and helping needy saints (Ac.4:32-35). Nothing else is revealed in Scripture with respect to the work of a local church. This means that the local church is NOT what many think it is. Let's explore this further...

The local church is not a community social club. It does not exist to provide social activities for the community – or its own membership, for that matter. This does not mean that social activities are inherently bad; it only means that it is not the work of a local church to provide them. We should not expect the local church to provide such things any more than we would expect it to provide community law-enforcement or to maintain the highways. It really is no more complicated than that! In fact, when the church at Corinth started down this path, the apostle Paul said, “What do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you” (1Cor.11:22).

The local church is not an entertainment center. It does not exist to entertain the community at large – or its own membership, for that matter. Simply put, the local church is not in the business of showing movies, providing concerts, hosting sporting events, or arranging comedy shows. As with our previous point, this does not mean that such activities are inherently evil; it only means that it is not the work of a local church to provide for them. If you want entertainment, then watch TV, or go to the theater/concert arena on your own dime. Do not expect the local church to provide this for you! Local churches who do such things are misappropriating the funds given for the true work of the local church.

The local church is not a teenage hangout. It does not exist to entertain your children – that's your responsibility! Do not expect the church to have a “Youth Minister” to cater to the wants of the young. It is no accident that among the various workers described in the Bible (e.g. 1Cor.12:28; Ep.4:11-12), a “Youth Minister” is conspicuously absent! That speaks volumes, especially when you consider that the Scriptures were Divinely-inspired, “*that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*” (2Tm.3:16-17). In other words, the Scriptures provide all the information we need to please God (1Th.4:1-2). Therefore, if something is not authorized by Scripture, it means that we should not be doing it! A local church can help teach your kids (cf. Tit.2:3-5), but not entertain them!

The local church is not your personal ATM. It does not exist to hand out cash to anyone and everyone who claims a need. This is perhaps one of the greatest misconceptions out there! I can't tell you how many calls are received from various individuals who seem to think the local church should just hand them money, buy their groceries, or pay their bills. And the worst of this is when people call and ask for “Christmas presents” for their kids. One lady wrote this congregation, asking for Christmas presents, and provided a list of toys and clothing sizes for her children. First of all, Christmas presents aren't a need; they are a “want” – and there is a difference! No one “needs” Christmas presents. I was always taught that, if you can't afford something, you don't buy it! What a concept! If more people actually tried to live within their means, they wouldn't find themselves with maxed-out credit cards and financial difficulties. *This is not to say that there are not legitimate needs out there (cf. Ga.6:10; Ep.4:28; Jm.1:27; 1Jn.3:17, etc.).* It only means that some needs are self-inflicted from poor management. Further, relieving the needy is actually not the primary work of the local church. Instead, it is secondary; and focused only upon the needs of Christians (Ac.4:32-35; Ac.11:27-30; 1Cor.16:1-3; 1Tm.5:3-16). The primary work of the local church is to advance the truth (cf. 1Tm.3:15).

I hope that this brief study has helped you to put the work of the local church into proper perspective. If we are to be the true “church of Christ,” then we must abide by what Christ has said!

--Lanny Smith