

# Do Not Let The Church Be Burdened...

## With Recreation and Entertainment

### INTRODUCTION:

1. Today's lesson is part 2 in a series of lessons.
2. Let's begin with the same passage we began with in the previous lesson: 1 Timothy 5:16. We talked some about the specific situation addressed in this passage, but what we really emphasized was the general principle taught in this passage: Do not burden the local church with responsibilities or activities that belong in other relationships.
3. Two main points were made in the previous lesson: (1) Local churches should not be burdened with the responsibility of providing for or supporting the secular education of children. (2) While local churches do have a responsibility to teach the word of God, they have no authority to support some other institution to accomplish that task.
  - a. Every effort was made to prove these points from Scripture (or, from the lack thereof).
4. This lesson: Local churches should not be burdened with planning, supporting, providing, or paying for the recreation and entertainment of its members (purely social activities).
  - a. Note: We'll talk specifically about social meals (fellowship halls) in a future lesson.
5. Many churches, including many churches of Christ, have built facilities designed for this very purpose: to provide recreation, entertainment, and various others social activities for their members.
  - a. Gymnasiums, family life centers, playgrounds—these are just a few examples. Additionally, churches will often sponsor an athletic team in the various "church leagues" around.
  - b. For entertainment, some churches have shown *Andy Griffith* reruns at their services. Some churches in this area have even shown the Super Bowl during their Sunday night services.
  - c. Whenever you hear a church talk about its youth ministry, at least in some cases, they're talking about an entertainment program for the youth. That's what some youth directors do—they plan fun, social activities for the youth in the congregation. In this area, trips to Six Flags are very popular. Beach retreats are also popular. They don't completely neglect efforts to teach the gospel, but it does tend to be overshadowed by the entertainment aspects.

6. Let's look at some reasons why local churches should not be burdened with these activities.

**BODY:**

**I. First and foremost, Jesus Christ does not authorize local churches to engage in these things.**

A. Here's what I did in my study of this issue.

1. I looked up all the passages in the New Testament that talk about a local church assembling or gathering together. I looked at what they did when they were assembled together. There was no mention of recreational activities.
2. I looked up all the passages that had to do with how local churches spent their money. None was spent on these kinds of things.
3. I looked up all the passages that discussed in any way the work of the church. Again, not even the slightest hint that local churches ought to be involved in these things (no commands, no examples, and nothing even implied).

B. Someone argue though, "The reason we don't see churches involved in these things in the New Testament is that there simply weren't many opportunities back then. They just weren't as recreation-minded and entertainment minded as people are today. Our culture is just different today."

1. There are a few things we ought to know about first century Roman society.
  - a. "Not only was the official Roman working day a short one by modern standards, but there were comparatively few working days in the year, except for slaves, who in any case were not allowed to attend public entertainments as spectators. In the reign of Claudius (41-54), 199 days in the year were designated public holidays, 90 of which shows were offered at public expense" (*Illustrated History of the Roman Empire*, via the Internet).
  - b. Referring to Grecian athletic contests of the first century, *Easton's Bible Dictionary* says this: "These were very numerous. The Olympic, Pythian, Nemean, and Isthmian games were esteemed as of great national importance, and the victors at any of these games of wrestling, racing, etc., were esteemed as the noblest and the happiest of mortals."

- c. Herod the Great certainly wanted people who were under his rule to be entertained: “Herod the Great built a theater and amphitheater in the neighborhood of the city, and instituted in the name of Caesar games which included Roman as well as Hellenic sports, celebrated every 5 years. There was also a hippodrome or racecourse for horses and chariots, bearing considerable resemblance to the Roman circus” (*ISBE*).
2. Think the first century churches could have drawn more people if they had sponsored some of these events or contests? Think they could have saved themselves from some of the persecution they endured? This leads to the next point...

## **II. Churches in the New Testament never used anything other than the gospel to draw people to the Lord.**

- A. Some in Paul’s day wanted something more than the gospel, so let’s notice his response.
  1. Read 1 Corinthians 1:22.
    - a. Paul could have produced both—the signs and the wisdom—but he refused to do so. Read vv. 23-24.
    - b. If Paul refused to offer signs and wisdom as incentives, what would have been his reaction to gymnasiums, ball teams, etc.?
- B. Jesus faced the same problem when He was here on the earth. His words, His teaching, were just not enough for some people.
  1. Read John 6:26-27, explaining the miracle Jesus had performed the day before (miraculously fed a multitude with just five loaves of bread and two small fish).
  2. Jesus spends the rest of the chapter talking about this spiritual bread, this food that endures to everlasting life.
    - a. Read vv. 35, 51, 58.
    - b. This is the bread that the church must offer to people today. This may not be what the world wants, but it’s what they need. It’s what they need if they want to go to heaven.
  3. Some who didn’t want it then (v. 66), proving they weren’t true followers, but “tagalongs.”

4. The news was not all bad, though, because Peter certainly got the point. Read vv. 67-68.
  - a. He intended to follow Jesus, because He had the words of eternal life.
5. If we're interested in making true disciples, and we should be, we must keep offering the bread of life.

**[But let's consider a third reason why churches should not be burdened with recreation and entertainment.]**

**III. The local church was not designed by God to provide recreation and entertainment; they were designed by God to work toward fulfilling His greatest desire: for "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4), for all men to "come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).**

- A. You can see this, first of all, in its worship.
  1. 1 Corinthians 14 discusses the worship activities of the church at Corinth, and in v. 26, Paul explains the intended result: "Let all things be done for **edification**" (and please the context define that term).
- B. In its simple organization.
  1. Expressed succinctly in Philippians 1:1—"to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in all Philippi, with the bishops and deacons."
  2. Local churches clearly were not set up to direct the full range of a Christian's activities or responsibilities.
- C. In the qualifications given for elders—for those who would lead the local church.
  1. Found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.
    - a. The emphasis is on godliness of life, knowledge of God's word, and the ability to teach.
- D. And you can see it in the work God gave the local church to do.
  1. To sound forth the word of the Lord (1 Thess. 1:8), and to support those involved in this great work (Philippians 4:15-16; 2 Corinthians 11:8), and of course, as we've already talked about, to nurture saints to spiritual maturity (Ephesians 4:11-16.)
  2. Burden the local church with these social activities and you drain away the vital energy and resources needed to do what God intended it to do.

**CONCLUSION:**

1. So let's return to the point made at the beginning of the lesson: Churches should not be burdened with facilitating recreation, entertainment, and other social activities.
2. Do these activities have their place? Of course, they do.
  - a. (1 Tim 4:8 NKJV) For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.
  - b. The New Testament describes some occasions where people were obviously entertained.
3. But, again, it is not the local church's responsibility to provide these things. Other relationships in which we're involved can provide these opportunities. It's good for Christians to do these kinds of things together, but we do not have to burden the church with it.
4. Some think we can't keep our young people interested unless we offer these recreational programs. Yes, it's good for our children to have opportunities for wholesome recreation and entertainment, but our children can learn like everyone else that the local church is not designed to provide these opportunities—that it's designed to equip them spiritually.