

## **Some Things the Church is Not**

by Heath Rogers

The gospels inform us that people were sometimes confused about the identity and purpose of Jesus. While some believed He was one of the prophets, others tried to dismiss Him as being possessed by demons. Some saw Him as a good Man, others labeled Him as a troublemaker and a blasphemer.

We should not be surprised to find that confusion continues to exist concerning both Christ and His church. The following are some misconceptions that people have about the church today.

**1. The church is not an ATM machine.** When some people fall on hard times, their cupboards get bare and their light bills are past due, they pick up the phone and start calling churches. We usually receive several calls every month from individuals requesting financial assistance. The Bible does not allow the church to be used and abused in this way. Local churches helped their own members who were in need (Acts 6:1, 1 Tim. 5:3-16), and they extended benevolence to needy members of the church in other places (Rom. 15:26), but they were never used as a charitable organization for the community at large. The purpose of the church is primarily spiritual in nature, not financial.

**2. The church is not in the entertainment business.** To some people, worship has become a spectator sport. Their feelings about worship are dependent upon what they have experienced with their eyes and ears, not what they have expressed with their own hearts. Preachers are sometimes looked upon as entertainers. They are judged by style rather than by substance. As long as they can deliver a polished, relevant, yet non-judgmental message in thirty minutes or less, churchgoers are pleased. Paul was not this kind of preacher (1 Cor. 2:1). The Lord warned the prophet Ezekiel that he was looked upon as an entertainer. "Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them" (Ez. 33:32).

**3. The church is not a social club.** To some people, a local church is nothing more than a social club or civic group. They use their membership as a status symbol, and they attend to see and be seen. Some people who are in sales are encouraged to use church membership as a means of making contacts with possible clients. Politicians are notorious for misusing churches in this manner. Several years ago, my sister heard a campaign speech by then presidential candidate Bill Clinton during morning worship services at a Baptist church that she attended. Most people can see through such hypocrisy. The church was bought with the shed blood of Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28). It is despicable for man to use the death of Jesus as a means of self-promotion and personal gain.

**4. The church is not a vehicle for social reform.** Politicians misuse churches, not only for elections, but also as a platform to achieve their favorite social programs. The church is not a political institution. The church should have a positive influence upon society, but not because it has been instrumental in signing petitions or applying pressure upon officials or authorities. The church is to support the truth (1 Tim. 3:15) and sound forth the gospel (1 Thess. 1:8). As individual members exert their influence (as salt and light – Matt. 5:13-16), others are won to the gospel. As more people are truly converted to Christ, the world is made a better place.

**5. The church (building) is not a wedding chapel.** There have been a few times (prior to moving to Edna) that I have received calls from people in the community wanting to use the church building for their weddings. On one such occasion, the parties involved were not members of any church, they just picked up the phone book and started calling churches. I am not opposed to having a wedding in a church building (I realize that some brethren are). However, I believe there is a world of difference

between a local church allowing its members to make such use of the building, and a church allowing its building to be "rented out" as a wedding chapel. If one is not religious enough to be a member of a church, why is it important to have a "church" wedding?

Churches should not allow themselves to be misused in these ways. The church in the Bible was engaged in three works: evangelism, edification and limited benevolence. We must learn to be content with the church as the Lord has planned it (Eph. 3:10-11).

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