



# The Tri-Cities Edifier

Volume 8

March 14, 2021

No. 11

## A Great Evangelistic Tool

Scott Smelser

I think this tool works better than radio, better than auto-dialers, better than showings of Jule Miller filmstrips, better than mailing out a bulletin, better than Dial-a-bible-reading, better than debates, better than cable TV.

What is it? It's brethren not being conformed to the world.

If a church is made up of people who understand 184 current and past issues (or more) correctly, but their lives do not show superior conduct, servitude, and holiness, don't expect an auto dialer, computer, printer, broadcast antenna, or cable outlet to compensate for the failure.

When church members think like the world, dress like the world; talk like the world; and chase money and status symbols like the world, it is the world that is winning them, not the other way around.

When church members are selfish, egotistical, arrogant, and shallow, then they are not in a position to help the world to a higher plane.

If our families are splitting up, our children are dropping out, and our homes are very little different from our neighbors then our "light" gets rather difficult to notice.

But if people learn self-denial (Luke 9:23), learn submission to God and care for neighbor (Matthew 22), learn to be servants (John 13), learn to be content (1 Timothy 6:8), learn to invest in family (Titus 2:5; Ephesians 6:4, Proverbs 22:6), and learn to clean out the inside of the cup, not just the outside (Matthew 23), then bright lights will shine.

"Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light...having your behavior seemly among the gentiles; that...they may glorify God" (1 Peter 2:9-12).

"Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God .. and be not fashioned according to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:1-2)

We are not called simply to know some things different from the world - we are called to rise above the world, and to "be holy" (1 Peter 1:15). And when people become that kind of light, it creates a great evangelistic tool.

And it will far exceed the effect of debates, radio, TV, and mail outs.



## God's Appeal to Sinners

Allen Dvorak

They are all around me in my neighborhood, at the gas station, in the grocery store. They are lost people, rapidly headed for eternity yet seemingly oblivious to the fact that they are unprepared for the final great judgment. They need the gospel. What are we doing to reach these people?

The urgency of the situation produces the temptation to do whatever it takes. If we can attract people to our assemblies or facilities by the promise of some social "carrot," surely the end justifies the means! Some brethren have run with that

argument. One congregation in Huntsville, Alabama has built a \$12 million “church complex” that includes a kitchen, gymnasium, fellowship hall and a place for wedding teas. Another area congregation essentially built a gymnasium for their meeting place in order to facilitate their intention to provide recreational activities for the members and the community.

### **Just Bad Judgment?**

Some would criticize such churches for their “extravagance” or “poor judgment.” A fellowship hall and kitchen for congregational dinners or a “family life center” is fine with them provided it doesn’t cost too much! What is the difference in principle between the practice of these churches? The “extravagant” brethren simply have more assets and a larger “vision.”

If we accept the premise that drawing people to Christ or keeping them in Christ by means of recreational activities is indeed scriptural, then criticizing brethren who are willing to spend vast amounts to promote “evangelism” in this way is merely divisive and perhaps even hypocritical. I believe that there is a greater problem.

### **The Jerusalem Volleyball Tournament**

Do we believe in our arrogance that modern man invented recreation or that early Christians were incapable of using recreation activities to attract people? Why do we not read about the Jerusalem Volleyball Invitational Tournament or the Antioch Ambassadors, an apostolic football team (they couldn’t get Paul to show up for practice; he was always on some missionary journey!)? The early Christians certainly understood the great need for evangelism (Acts 8:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:8). These brethren, however, did not schedule barbecues or build jogging tracks to “entice” prospects; they taught people the word of God!

There is the complete absence of any command to the early congregations to provide recreation. There is no approved example of any early church doing so. Where is the scriptural authority for any local church to sponsor recreation from its collective funds?

### **The Need For Fellowship**

Can we defend church-sponsored recreation as “fellowship” even though the word “fellowship” is never used in the New Testament to describe recreational activities? Can you find a single instance where context clearly indicates that the word refers to social activities?

We are called by the gospel to joint participation with Christ in our salvation (1 Corinthians 1:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). We become partners with other Christians as we share in spiritual activities.

### **The Appeal of the Gospel**

Is church sponsored recreation merely one of many acceptable methods of fulfilling the command to preach the gospel? Certainly the Lord’s disciples are allowed some liberty in the specific ways in which they obey generic commands. On the other hand, no such expedient way of fulfilling our responsibilities should violate other scriptural principles.

The gospel is God’s power to salvation (Romans 1:16; James 1:21). The appeal of the gospel is to the spiritual side of man, not the physical. The gospel calls upon men to change their hearts, not don a sports uniform (Acts 3:18-19; 17:30-31). The message of the cross is that God has provided an efficacious sacrifice, a perfect High Priest and a sympathetic Savior (Hebrews 9:11-14; 7:25-8:1; Luke 19:10). Churches who pour their money into recreational facilities or activities seem to think that instead God sent a personal trainer or sports coach.

If our appeal to sinners is through recreation, will they be converted to Christ or to pleasure?

The social gospel was bred in unbelief and skepticism. Instead of casting their anchors of hope into the presence of God (Hebrews 6:19), the denominations turned their attention from the spiritual needs of men to societal ills. Brethren have taken up their faithless call and have set their minds on things below instead of focusing on those things which are above (Colossians 3:1-2).

“We must minister to the whole man.” “Christians who work together ought to play together.”

Such statements are made to justify a church’s use of its collective funds for recreation. Local churches are never charged in the New Testament to provide health clubs, run restaurants or entertain the saints or the community, nor does the responsibility to preach the gospel necessitate by inference any of those things.

Is there a great need for evangelism? Certainly. That need should be met the way that it was in the first century by preaching the word!