

THANKFUL OR FUTILE

David Halbrook

Thanksgiving Day ought to provoke some deeper thoughts and questions than eating turkey can evoke, but let's start there: Where did turkeys come from? Was there a time when turkeys did not exist or do they have eternal spirits? Without the Bible, you have no sure answer--maybe they were brought here by aliens or evolved from ancient amoebas! You may not be thinking "Anything is possible!" Yes, with God all things are possible, but not all things are reality.

Reality is that God exists and expects & deserves thanks. By ignoring His existence & rule and our duty to express our thanks to Him, we are led into futile thinking and living. Romans 1 lists examples of futility, like false religion which often cannot distinguish between the value of human and animal life. Evil inventions, such as the mini-skirt, the theory of (macro)evolution, and lottery tickets all sinfully abuse God-given gifts. This is the life of those who do not like to retain God in their knowledge. Being unthankful for what He has said and done they prefer *to do those things that are not fitting* (Rom. 1:28). On Thanksgiving, will your thoughts be thankful or futile?

-- *Editor's Note:* Romans 1 deals with the consequences of being unthankful. It is right that our nation values the virtue of gratitude. It is our job to teach and remind them that God must be the object of our thanksgiving, every day. Surely the subject will make this article useful-- find it this week in *Arkansas Weekly* and pass it on to someone. If someone agrees with it, maybe they'll be interested in reading these articles in the future. If they do not agree, maybe that will open a door of conversation for you. Watch, work, and pray!

We assemble each Sunday at 10AM, 10:45AM, 5PM & Wednesday at 7PM

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The Exhorter

Acts 11:23 *Exhorted them all... cleave unto the Lord*

Church of Christ--Quail Valley

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DON'T JUST GO TO CHURCH, BE THE CHURCH

Jonathan Perz

The mind and heart of one who merely goes to church differs greatly from the mind and heart of one who realizes he is part of the church.

One who merely goes to church sees church as a place. He knows the church is the people, and not a building, yet church is still someplace he goes. Spiritually and physically, he arrives at church and leaves church. It is a place with expectations, conduct and qualities that differ from his day-to-day existence. In his mind and even in his speech, church is a "where" and not a "who."

He sees church as a temporary activity, an appointment to keep, an obligation to fulfill. It has a start time and an end time and fits neatly into a block in his datebook. It might even be a priority, but it still must compete with other comparable items on his calendar. When an item is completed, he can check it as done, at least until the next scheduled event.

While church may be an enjoyable experience to him, it is just that—an experience. He goes, feels good about it and comes home. He treats church much like he would treat a movie or a concert. The experience might touch him in a deeper way than other activities, but ultimately, it is tantamount to a feeling that comes and then is gone.

Though "church" in our modern culture has in many ways been belittled to this superficial reality, it is simply not treated in this manner in the Bible. Jesus died for more than a place, an activity or an experience. A Christian must accept and realize his redeemed status as part of the blood-bought church! Paul told the elders of the church in Ephesus, "to shepherd the church of God which he [Jesus] purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).

A Christian must begin to see the depth of his relationship to Christ as part of the bride of Christ (Rev. 21:2, 9; 22:17). Illustrating the marriage relationship, Paul told

the Ephesians, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27).

Jesus told Peter "on this rock I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18). In light of Peter's admonishment to us as Christians, "Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:4-5), realize that Jesus did not have a physical building or place in mind, but a spiritual people in mind. Peter wasn't suggesting that we go to church. He was telling us to be the church.

Being the church is far more encompassing and requires a far greater commitment than simply going to church. So, the next time you "go to church" ... challenge yourself with the question, "What have I done during the rest of the week to be part of the church?" (<http://moodychurchofchrist.com/>)

A BAPTIST PREACHER ON CHURCH SOCIALS

Marshall Patton

"There are those who hold the social and humanitarian ideal for the church. They put the Lord's church on the same par with the Red Cross, Salvation Army, Y.M.C.A., etc. To such folk the church's main concern is not to take the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth and thus prepare souls for the eternity beyond, but transforming the world into a better place to live, putting the emphasis on the NOW instead of the hereafter. In the average religious institution today (even many churches of Christ, MEP) one can get anything from a sandwich to a sermon."

"Recreational features are prominent. Swimming pools, gyms, reading rooms and the like are a major part of the churches today. As a result of this 'social gospel,' the churches are filled with lost church members. If Christ Were to enter some of the church buildings today He would start throwing out things just as He did long ago when He entered the temple and overturned the money changer s' tables and drove out those that were making God's house a house of Merchandise."— -By Bob L. Ross, BAPTIST EXAMINER, Vol. 28,"No. 4b, page 16, via GOSPEL VISITOR.

The above article is typical of some denominationalists today. They have tried and failed and are now trying to turn from the "social gospel" toward the truth that frees. While they may have a long way to go yet, what is being said and done in some

denominational circles clearly indicates that some have recognized the futility of the "social gospel" to accomplish God's purpose in the hearts of men and women.

Unfortunately our liberal brethren are embracing now what the denominations have already tried in vain. The Jackson Avenue Church of Christ in Memphis, Tennessee, recently bought 167 acres on which a lodge (\$18,000) with recreation hall, dining area to accommodate 250, kitchen, showers, etc., is nearing completion. A swimming pool is planned and later a lake is to be developed to provide fishing.

Again, from a bulletin in Nashville, Tennessee: "West End church of Christ has invited Lipscomb, Peabody and Vanderbilt students to share the facilities of the recreation room in their Bible school annex. Available for banquets and special meetings, the room also provides television, ping-pong and other recreation equipment." Church sponsored Boy Scout Troops, ball teams, camps, and other forms of recreation are a common part of the program of work of many liberal churches today. While some of them may be moving down the "social gospel" road with some misgivings and reluctance— still, they are on their way. Others are moving at a high rate of speed.

One thing is certain— the speed with which our liberal brethren are traveling this road increases by the hour. Their prominent preachers, men of influence and position, institutions, and papers— all endorse it. Their course has been carefully chartered and there is no turning back. It is ride along with us or, sooner or later, get out!

All should remember that the power by which men are drawn to Christ is the gospel (John 6:44, 45; Rom. 1:16). When men are drawn by something else they are drawn to something else.

Editor's Note: This article was published in a book titled Answers for our Hope by Marshall Patton in 1982. You judge whether the recreational focus of religious groups has grown or shrunk since 1982. For decades, children have grown up associating "church" with "recreation." In their youth, the recreation involved a swing-set and dining room purchased by the church. Today, the swing-set and dining room have grown into a complete playground and multi-purpose "Family Life Center." Many of those children are now adults and are parents, elders, deacons, teachers, and preachers. What will be the result of this for the next generation? Remember this, if you are tempted to think that these subjects are not important.