

## The Church Is Not a Gated Community

I spoke with a long-time Christian friend of mine the other day who told me he was retiring and moving into a new home in a very prestigious gated community. He said that the community was completely fenced in and had guards stationed throughout the 500+ acre complex, and only the residents of that community had access in and out. He said that he was looking forward to moving to a community where he and his family didn't have to worry about outsiders coming in and disturbing them.

There's certainly nothing wrong with Christians choosing to live in gated communities so long as they don't view the church of our Lord in the same light! Christian's deciding for themselves' who is and who isn't worthy to be part of the Lord's church is wrong! A *"You're not welcome"* attitude toward outsiders (visitors- members and non-members alike) must never be. The church is not a gated community! True, there are terms/conditions that must be met before one can become a member of the body of Christ (**cf. Acts 2:37-47; Rom. 5:1-2; Gal. 3:26ff**). But make no mistake about it, the Lord sets the terms and does the adding- not man! I'm afraid many within the kingdom of the Lord have become Pharisaical in their dealings with others (**cf. Mark 2:14-17**). Consider some important truths found within this passage.

First, Jesus looked not at a person's problem, but at a person's potential (**Mark 2:14**). Matthew was a hated tax-collector, and yet Jesus stopped momentarily to speak to him. Jesus wanted the man no one else wanted. He didn't look at the outward being but the inward (**cf. 1 Sam. 16:7**). We too must see people as did Jesus- not as a problem but as potential!

Secondly, many sought Jesus because no one else would have them (**Mark 2:15**). Publicans and sinners (community outcasts) sought Him. These were individuals that the religious elite of Jesus' day sought to avoid. But not Jesus! People were drawn to Him because He cared (**Mat. 11:28-30**). Shouldn't we have the kind of disposition that others are drawn to?

Thirdly, many of the religious elite of Jesus' day developed a gated-community attitude toward outsiders' (**Mark 2:16**). The scribes and Pharisees couldn't understand how Jesus could associate with such unworthy people. They despised the common man, but Jesus loved him. Who are we to determine who is and who isn't worthy? I'm thankful my God did not have this closed-minded attitude toward me, a wretched sinner (**Rom. 5:8-9**).

Finally, the Lord was concerned for lost souls (**Mark 2:17**). The scribes and Pharisees were afraid of the contagion of the sinner- they were afraid that they themselves might be infected with sin. They were like a doctor who would refuse to attend a case of infectious illness lest he himself contracted it. Jesus was One who forgot Himself in a great desire to save others (**Luke 19:10**). The Lord was concerned for lost souls, and His desire is that we, His people, be likewise concerned (**Mark 16:15-16; Luke 14:21-23**).

The church of our Lord is not a gated-community accessible only to those whom we deem worthy! It is open and available to all who would obey! Let's be that city on a hill shining forth the light of the Gospel in hopes of drawing a sin-darkened world to it (**Mat. 5:14**)!

Terry R. Townsend