

1953

50th Anniversary

2003

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

"... Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body." - Ephesians 5:23

Volume 37

Mammoth Spring, AR 72554

March 2003

No. 3

IDENTITY CRISIS IN THE CHURCH

By Burl Curtis

Those in contact with many congregations of the Lord's church report there is an identity crisis among them. This is not true of all of them nor of all the members. As a brother, who was converted from Catholicism, said in Bible class, "I don't have an identity crisis!" He knew what he believed and why he believed it. As sure as the promises of God, he knew who he was and what church he was a member of. By faith, he knew he had obeyed the gospel from the heart and the Lord had added him to His church.

What has caused this crisis and how can the problem be solved? Understanding the requirements for identification should help. Likenesses are not enough. Two wings, feathers, a beak, and two feet identify a bird but you don't know whether it is a crow or a canary. Two hands and feet and the ability to walk in an upright position are required for identification but you don't know whether it is a monkey or a man. The more two things are similar, the more specific one has to get for identification. Black and gray with Franklin's picture on the front and green on the back with a picture of Independence Hall identifies a \$100 bill but you don't know whether it is counterfeit or genuine. The only way to know if the bill is good is to look more closely (Matthew 7:15-20).

The church that belongs to Jesus has been criticized and made fun of for holding firmly to

the Scriptures. True disciples have been ridiculed and opposed for standing for required marks of identification. At the top of the list would probably be their insistence that baptism is only immersion and that it is unto remission of sins, not because sins are already forgiven (Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21). The list goes on: (2) preachers not being called pastor or reverend; (3) having no organ or piano in worship; (4) taking the Lord's Supper each Sunday; (5) refusing to take any denominational name; (6) not allowing women to be elders, deacons, and preachers; (7) collecting money only through free-will offerings of the members; (8) holding to the Bible teaching on organization, etc. (cf. Jude 3). Are these more important than faith in Christ, love, mercy, grace, and the cross? NO! But they are required for identification (Matt. 7:21). If all you knew about an animal was that it had the essential marks of a body and four legs, you would not know what it was. Also, if all you knew about an animal was that it had long ears, you could not tell whether it was a mule or a basset hound. For identification both basic and specific marks are required (Ephesians 4:1-6).

To identify any religious organization, it must keep its distinguishing characteristics. For example if the Baptist or Methodist church suddenly dropped all that made them Baptists or Methodists, they would lose their identity.

These should help to solve the identity crisis:

1. Strong Bible teaching so members will know their identity.
2. Stop the desire to make the church more and more like denominationalism.
3. Hold to the Bible for it is the only standard to establish the identity of the church of Christ. Remember, when you depart from the Bible, there is no acceptable identification standards.
4. Permit no paper, college preacher, nor majority vote to establish its identity.
5. Don't allow those under 30 (or those over 30), including college students, to dictate its identity.
6. Remember the church began on Pentecost, not with the American Restoration Movement.
7. Reject the "it doesn't matter, it isn't important" attitude.

The identity crisis has been caused by cutting loose from the doctrine of Christ (2 John: 9-11). When unscriptural items are added or scriptural items taken away and accepted by any group, an identity crisis is sure to follow. Now that they are no longer securely anchored to the Word of God, what is the standard? How is identity to be determined? If you can add or take away what you want, do not others have the same privilege? Such a process makes someone Lord other than Jesus (Luke 6:46).

118 Red Oak Lane
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FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

USPS Publication #211780

... is a Periodical publication issued monthly by the Church of Christ at Third and Bethel (P.O. Box 251), Mammoth Spring, AR 72554-0251. **POSTMASTER: Please mail all changes of address to the above address.**

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FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

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WINDS OF CHANGE

by Owen D. Olbricht

Any casual observer can realize that radical changes are taking place in many churches throughout the United States. The motivational force behind these changes is an effort to pack the pews. There is nothing wrong in seeking attendance but the methods being used is what matters.

In the religion section of the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, Sat., Feb. 19, 2000, p. 4B, under the heading, "Baptist by any other name," J.J. Thompson wrote that the present day effort of churches is to reach the "unchurched." He went on to write, "What religious leaders are finding is that it takes new methods of worshipping, teaching and sharing, though not necessarily new beliefs, to appeal to people who often feel out of place in traditional church."

"Thus the rise in contemporary services, featuring casual dress

and light rock Christian songs played by bands, as opposed to 'Sunday clothes' and organ-accompanied hymns in traditional services."

This may all sound good if a large attendance is the only concern. Is there more to following Jesus than being driven to attendance based on modern innovations?

Paul wrote, "that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive" (Ephesians 4:14).

CLOTHING

What is wrong with casual clothing? Perhaps nothing except that instead of wearing what is casual some wear their worst as a sign of rebellion to the norm. They probably would not dress that way if they were invited to a dinner to honor a high official or dignitary.

What Malachi wrote concerning Israel's sacrificial gifts might well apply here. "Offer it then to (My comment, Dress like this then for) the governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?" (1:8b). If the people we are seeking to honor would not be pleased, how much less would God be pleased by unsightly clothing.

ROCK BANDS

An appeal through instrumental music such as rock bands is another matter. Instrumental music in worship was introduced long years after the apostles taught Christians to observe "all" Jesus had commanded (Matthew 28:20). The use of instrumental music was not included in their teaching so was not introduced by Jesus, the apostles, or the inspired prophets of the New Testament upon which the church is built (Ephesians 2:20, 5:19-20; Colossians 3:16-17). The organ is not authorized in their teaching and neither are the bands that have been used to take the place of the organ.

WHAT APPEALS TO SOCIETY

The mood of today that has caused churches to appeal to what excites our contemporary society is the same mood that has caused innovations of various kinds over the past centuries. The goal of the Lord's people should be neither to reject or to accept the mood swings of society. Their goal should be to teach and practice those things that please Jesus, which things we can learn only in the teaching of the New Testament.

Paul wrote, "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10). "Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God" (1 Thes. 3:1).

By creating a broad way or by making God's way broader than God has made it so that many will enter, we will not get people to enter the narrow way, a way only a few will enter and travel (Matt 7:13,14).

If our society is as corrupt and rebellious as the one in the days of Noah, all the methods we may use to appeal to the lost that will please them but not bring them to submit to the truth of Jesus Christ that frees from sin (John 8:31,32), will not make them acceptable to God. Our responsibility is not to cave in to the desires of society but rather to get it to repent. Repentance was the message of John (Matthew 3:2), Jesus (Matthew 4:17), Peter (Acts 2:38; 2 Peter 3:9), and Paul (Acts 17:30). Our message should be the same today.

CONCLUSION

We should not be interested in "traditional," "contemporary," or any worship of human origin. Our interest should be in worship that is in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

Observing which way religious winds are blowing should not be our concern. Our goal should not

be what attracts the most people but should be to follow what God desires of us and what is pleasing to Him. We will not be judged by what appeals to men but by the word of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (John 12: 48).

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FAITH

by Clyde Frazier (Deceased)

A soul without faith is like a building without foundation, for faith is the foundation upon which its salvation is built. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). A building built on the sand, Jesus said, will not stand. The soul who does not believe cannot hope for salvation, for "without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). We must believe in God and believe that He will render the eternal salvation which he promised on the basis of our faith. Realizing the power of his promises upon mankind and knowing that we desire to believe in immortality, He instructed us how to obtain faith. "So then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

Since all we know about God is found in the Bible, then we have what he has given, and, with confidence in it, faith is wrought by our hearing Him and becomes the evidence of things not seen. "That the trial of your faith; being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ; whom having not seen, ye love; in whom; though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:7,8). We have never seen our Savior and shall not until He comes to claim the faithful.

Many seek faith in error, seeking for a miraculous sign or a

personal appearance of Jesus Christ. Such shall never be. Many testify to a faith produced by supposed miraculous feelings and the confidence they have is based on their feelings. This is never so. Faith, he said, is the evidence, and "faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God." It is foolish to say we are saved separate and apart from the word of God. This is equivalent to saying we are saved without faith!

"I am come a light into the world; that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I come not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:46-48).

(FCGN March, 1953).

MORALITY IS NOT ENOUGH

by Arvey Powell (Deceased)

Our Savior said "Upon this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). This rock is the fact that he is the son of God. He built His church upon that rock. The Apostle Paul said of Jesus "And he is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the first born from the dead" (Col. 1:18). "Christ loved the church and gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). It (the church) is to be presented unto him. "A glorious church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Eph. 5:27).

Since there is no salvation except in Christ, to be in him is to be in his body (the church). A redeemed person is one who has been "baptized into Christ" (Gal. 3:27).

Oftentimes men outside the church are as good morally as genuine Christians, but morality alone will not suffice. Morality must be combined with spirituality to be saved in Christ and to provide any promise of eternal life with Him.

(FCGN March, 1953).

BOBBY KNIGHT AND THE BIBLE

Indiana University's long-time, legendary and often controversial head basketball coach, Bob Knight, was fired after several complaints of verbal and even physical abuse against his players and others were lodged against him. The university placed him under close scrutiny with a "zero tolerance" policy. Afterward Knight reportedly grabbed a freshman student who called him simply by his last name, to, as Knight put it, "teach him some manners." Because of this incident, Knight was given the opportunity to resign as basketball coach; an opportunity he refused. He was then promptly fired by Indiana University.

Numerous accounts of Knight's coaching career and segments of interviews conducted with him over the years have been seen in the days following his dismissal. Following the Sunday announcement of his being fired, one of the sports channels aired segments of several such interviews on Monday. One of the segments, ironically, showed the hot-tempered and often foul-mouthed Knight quoting Scripture from the Bible. The interview was conducted shortly after Knight's being levied with the "zero tolerance policy" by the university. Concerning the school's actions Knight said, "I can in no manner be seen as a Bible scholar; but the Bible says somewhere, 'Judge not that you be not judged.'" Then, in the answer to the next question asked of him, Knight took God's name in vain in his reply.

Here is an example of one who uses the Bible only in instances when it seemingly benefits his cause and helps his case. Otherwise, God's name is only something to be invoked as an expletive when a dramatic point needs to be made.

Perhaps no other passage is abused as much in our go-along-to-get-along society as Matthew 7:1, the passage quoted by Bob Knight. The prohibition in this passage (as seen in its

context) is not against the forming of opinions or even against judging. The prohibition is against making harsh judgments without proper evidence or from the wrong motives. Elsewhere our Lord commanded us to make judgments (John 7:24). These judgments, commanded by our Lord, are to be made in a righteous fashion. Concerning such the Lord said, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20). Actions form attitudes, which determine lifestyles. Far too many want the freedom to judge others without having the discerning eye of others upon them. Ironically, it is some of these same people who want the freedom to appeal to God's word only when it is convenient for them.

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The church of Christ in your area has a number of **free** Bible Study services to offer you. If you have a desire to study the Scriptures to come to an understanding of God's will for you, or to make certain that you know what to do to be saved and remain saved, we will be delighted to sit down with you in your own home and study the Bible with you. If you would like to study through a Bible Correspondence Course, we will gladly lead you through such a course by mail. If you desire a Bible tract on a particular subject, we will do our best to locate material on the subject you request and get that to you. If you have questions about any of the articles that appear in **Fulton County Gospel News** or any other Bible topic, we will do our best to give you an answer from the Bible. Of course, there are no charges for any of these services offered by churches of Christ.

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- Mammoth Spring Church of Christ

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The address reflects the local church of Christ (coc) and the paper we publish (fcgn). Please make this change immediately. You may also send me personal correspondence at this address.

Thank you - Ted J. Clarke, editor

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GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (1 Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; 1 Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; 1 Corinthians 12:13).

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