TODAY'S ORDER OF WORSHIP

Welcome by: Bobby Rader/Opening Prayer by: Robert Ward
Morning Assembly Song Leader: Bobby Rader

#2 We Praise Thee, O God
#778 Be With Me Lord

Scripture Reading by: Parker Balch
#350 When My Love Grows Weak

Communion Devotional by: Zach Arthur
Lord's Supper and Contribution

#162 All Hail the Power
Sermon: "Follow Me"
Matthew 4:18-22

#948 I Am Resolved
#414 Anywhere with Jesus
Closing Prayer by: Don Lynn

Tonight is our
3rd Sunday Evening
Singing

Other Opportunities For Spiritual Growth

Sunday: 9:00am — Bible Study Classes, 10:00am — Worship, 5:00pm — Worship
Wednesday: 6:30pm — Bible Study Classes

Jan. 15, 2023

"Stand Firm in…Liberty"

Galatians 5:1

What is Cultural Christianity and What are the Dangers?

This is an article from Wes McAdams' "Radically Christian" a few weeks ago. I thought it was relevant for us on a number of different levels, as we deeply consider what it means to be a disciple (and how that might mean re-thinking some of our practices). It is slightly altered in format for our space. BP

A cultural Christian is someone who identifies as a Christian, but whose religious ideas and practices come more from popular culture than from Christ. A cultural Christian, of course, does not recognize he or she is practicing cultural Christianity. To put it bluntly, they are self-deceived. They think they are following Jesus when they are really just following a nominally religious crowd.

Cultural Christianity could take many different forms, depending on the culture in which it is found. But because it is the context I know, I am going to describe some of the forms cultural Christianity takes in the United States. These may or may not transfer to other cultural contexts. As you consider this list, realize that cultural Christianity happens in degrees. For many of us, our faith is probably a combination of genuine Christian thought and practice, as well as cultural influences we have unintentionally absorbed. This is why we should closely examine areas like these:

1. Religious Nostalgia. Many people have an emotional (rather than theological, doctrinal, or even functional) attachment to certain religious practices and traditions. After all, traditions feel good. We get a warm and fuzzy feeling when we eat the same Thanksgiving foods our mother and grandmother used to serve. And some people get a similarly warm and fuzzy feeling about certain religious practices. This nostalgia might be attached to singing certain hymns or getting dressed up to "go to church." It may also be tied to having Sunday night services or the preacher offering an invitation after his sermon. Someone might advocate for these practices not because he reads of them in Scripture, or even because he is being positively shaped and formed by them, but simply because he has fond memories attached to these practices. Nostalgic traditions are not bad in and of themselves. However, they can easily lead to vain worship. Vain worship happens when we maintain our traditions at the expense of (or in place of) obeying the commandments of God (see **Mk 7:1-13**).

2. Disjointed Bible Knowledge. Generally speaking, cultural Christians love the Bible and believe it is "God's word." It is not unusual for cultural Christians to quote the Bible or have Bible verses plastered on the walls of their homes and the bumpers of their cars. This is certainly good that they have such high regard for Scripture. However, their knowledge of Scripture is typically limited to some stories, a few feel-good verses, or a handful of proof-texts. This can be true of all sorts of cultural Christians: fans of prosperity preachers; supporters of "hellfire and brimstone" preachers; those who claim to simply read the Bible for themselves; progressives; conservatives. They all know the verses that prove their point, condemn their enemies, or make them feel good. But they don't understand the overall story of Scripture. They pull verses completely out-of-context to support preconceived ideas. This disjointed knowledge of the Bible creates people who twist, misuse, and pervert Scripture (see **2 Pet 3:14-18**). It has also caused many to develop a defensive posture concerning their faith. In other words, they cannot articulate what they are for, but they can articulate what they are against.

Family News & Notes

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH YOUR CHURCH FAMILY

Our Sick

Robert Williams, the Mast's son in law has been diagnosed with cancer in his jaw and will have surgery this month.

May Belle Sibley is at home after being in the hospital.

Continued Prayers
(Need cards, phone calls & visits)

Geri Cryer, Steve Ward, Oscar Cantu, Caitlin Smith, Virginia Cole, Ka'Leisha Jones, Linda Frank, Ken Coleman, Joe Edd Stifflemire, Susan McCain

Shut Ins
(Need cards, phone calls & visits)

Jim Smith, Winona Angelle, Myrtle Sheffield, Catherine Parker, Peggy McIntosh, Lois Watts, Willo Dean Ellis

Our Missionaries

Aaron & Marisa Bailey in Montepuez, Mozambique , Rod Kyle in the South Pacific

Upcoming Activities

Elders, Minister meeting Wednesday, Jan. 18th at 5:00 p.m..

We will have a meal this Wednesday night at 5:30 p.m. in the family life center.

Primetimers will be going to Tiger Harry's on Tuesday, Jan. 24th at 6:00 pm. A sign up sheet is on the bulletin board.

Small Groups

We will be launching a new small groups ministry on Sundays this month in lieu of our traditional evening services. We will be starting our small groups on Sunday, January 22nd. If you have any questions, see Bryant or one of the Elders.

Elders	Deacons	Minister
Ken Coleman	Zach Arthur	Bryant Perkins
Bobby Rader	Daniel Balch	
Don Taylor	Danny Balch	
Robert Ward	Walden David	
	Gus Tristan	

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3. Generic Theology. Cultural Christians talk a lot about "God." They might use phrases like: put God back in schools, in God we trust, and God bless America. They may also talk about their relationship with God and how they want to discover his will for their lives. However, cultural Christians seldom mention "Jesus." There's very little in their theology that is specifically and uniquely Christian. Most of what they believe, from their morality to their eschatology, is actually shared with many theists. In fact, sociologists have identified "moralistic therapeutic deism" as the most popular worldview in U.S. culture. In other words, if you ask Americans what their religion is, most will say they are Christians. However, if you begin to really drill down on their beliefs, most Americans are actually deists, rather than Christians.

4. Alignment with Political Movements. It is a good thing when Christians can find common ground and points of agreement with their neighbors. After all, the United States is a democratic republic and everyone is allowed to participate in the political process. We can choose to be part of the conversation on achieving the common good for ourselves and our neighbors. This is a privilege our first-century brothers and sisters did not have. However, many cultural Christians have gone beyond finding a few narrow points of agreement and have conflated various political philosophies with Christian doctrine. They have fully embraced certain political platforms, parties, and politicians. And specific political solutions are taken to be matters of faith; those who propose or promote alternative solutions are seen as enemies on which righteous indignation should be unleashed. This can be true of cultural Christians on every point of the political spectrum (left, right, and center). They believe their ideas are the clear Christian choice. They have anointed political philosophers, founding fathers, pundits, and cultural warriors as something like prophets, apostles, and evangelists. Politics has become their religion and they are blind to the fact that the kingdom of God does not fully align with the agenda of any earthly kingdom.

5. Virtue Replacement. I have saved the most important aspect of cultural Christianity until the end. In the first century, Christians shared many virtues with their pagan and Jewish neighbors (e.g. love, kindness, self-control). However, there were also some virtues that were fairly unique to Christianity. Some of these unique virtues were meekness, selflessness, servitude, and submission. These remain relatively unique today.

Cultural Christians have exchanged these uniquely Christian virtues for cultural virtues such as individualism, ambition, bravery, and self-expression. In spite of the fact that these are nowhere extolled by Jesus or the apostles, cultural Christianity has adopted these as core virtues. When there is a conflict between the virtues of Jesus and the virtues of culture, cultural Christians choose cultural virtues. Reading the Bible, saying prayers, singing hymns, taking communion, and even being baptized are not an end in themselves. They are all a means to an end: that the character of Christ may be formed in us (**Gal 4:19; Eph 4:11-16**). There are plenty of people who have been baptized, get dressed up and go to church, work hard, read the Bible, pray, and vote but are not followers of Jesus. The indication that a person is a genuine follower of Jesus is that the Spirit is producing very specific fruit in their life (**Gal 5:22-23**).

Conclusion

There is, of course, an overlap between Christianity and cultural Christianity. Genuine followers of Jesus have much in common with cultural Christians. That's why it is hard to tell whether we ourselves are truly following Jesus. Not only can we fool others into believing we are truly committed to Christ, but we can fool ourselves.

My encouragement would be this: "*Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*" **(2 Cor13:5).**