

“Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” — John 12:21

Until notified otherwise, all gatherings at building have been cancelled due to “safe at home” regulations ordered by the state of California.

## Christians Only: That’s Our Aim

We believe that the only way to please God is to follow Christ — to be true disciples, and a true “church of Christ.” We believe that a local church can be organized as first century churches were organized (see Philippians 1:2) and can function the way as churches in the first century functioned. Our goal is to return to the original plan for the church, as Christ intended when He built it.

Why do we try? Because a restoration of true New Testament Christianity is the only way to avoid the confusion and division we witness in the religious world today.

Long ago, Jeremiah said, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; and you will find rest for your souls.’” (Jeremiah 6:16).

We want to be Christians – nothing more, nothing less; Christians only, meeting with other Christians, doing what Christians are expected to do. This is important because Christ, the Author of Christianity, expects it: Mt 16:16; 28:18-20. He has the authority to demand it. He gave the apostles authority to build on His foundation (Eph. 2:20). He built the church and He is the only one who has authority to change it (and He hasn’t).

Man is not capable of building a “church of Christ.” Only Christ can do that and only Christ has done it.

We want to be *Christians*.

We have a blueprint for bringing the reality of New Testament Christianity to the 21st century.

That blueprint is the New Testament. It requires sensible, thoughtful and objective interpretation of Scripture and application, but Paul assures us that we can understand the will of the Lord (Eph. 5:18). Our faith comes from hearing God’s word (Romans 10:17) and we can speak “as the very utterance of God” (1 Peter 4:11).

We speak where Bible speaks, and are silent where it is silent; we do Bible things in Bible ways and call Bible things by Bible names.

Allowing the Bible to “call the shots” is the only way we can hope for unity. It is the only possible avenue to the “one mind and one spirit” that Christ expected and called for (Phil. 1:27; 1 Cor. 1:10).

So why is religious unity so elusive? We must ask some hard questions: to whom am I loyal: to Christ or to something or someone else? Do I really believe the Bible is the final authority or do I listen to other voices? Religious unity is impossible with those who insist on a relative, rather than *absolute*, view of truth.

Religious unity is a wonderful thing and it *is* attainable. But our goals must be clear: (1) to be Christians, in the true sense of the term, and (2) to work at making the church just like Jesus intended it to be. Only then can we realize the unity of all of those who are of like mind.

Our plea to everyone we know and love is to go back to the New Testament for the answers. When the end of time comes, the only “unity” that will matter will be our unity with God and Christ and the Holy Spirit. — **dp**

“We want to be Christians – nothing more, nothing less; Christians only, meeting with other Christians, doing what Christians are expected to do.”

# Skunks

By Adam Rico

## **We have a skunk problem.**

No, really, we have a skunk wandering around our backyard at all hours of the night and day. If you live in a rural neighborhood this is hardly something to get excited about, but in the suburbs, during a pandemic quarantine, this is the highlight of the week.

At first it was exciting, maybe a little scary, and cause for a call to the local skunk removal service. Now that we're a few

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days into this, the skunk continues to evade capture and has proven to be smarter than all of us. We didn't ask the skunk to move in, but now he uses our backyard like an interstate highway to the neighbor's backyard chicken coop.

Sometimes the mind is like my backyard. We have attitudes, mindsets, and thinking that move in without us even noticing. However, according to the Apostle Paul, we need to approach some of our thoughts the same way we approach an uninvited skunk. When bad attitudes and negative thinking and self-defeating thoughts move in we need to take them captive.

In 2 Corinthians 10, Paul indicates some were claiming he was easy on the Corinthians in person but "bold" in his letters when he wasn't with them (v.1) and he was operating with a worldly motivation as opposed to Godly motives (v. 2).

Paul responds to these charges by informing the Corinthians he

is quite capable of being "bold" (v.2) but he does not "wage war" the same way the world fights (v.3). Paul goes on to describe his approach to spiritual warfare when he says, "We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ." (2 Cor. 10:5)

The word "captive" is an uncomfortable word. It implies a captor and a power struggle. Yet, that's exactly what is going on

with our thoughts. We are in a power struggle with who we allow to be in control of our thinking. Will it be fear, anxiety, selfishness, anger or another negative thought? Or will it be Christ?

So, back to the skunk. I wish the best for the skunk, but just not in our backyard. It's time for him to be escorted somewhere else to live a nice skunk life.

In these days of 24/7 news cycle and a lot of negativity floating around the internet it's easy to get sucked in. What if we treated our thoughts like the skunk? What if we evaluated every thought and removed the stinky ones?

What if instead we listened to the words of Paul: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." (Philippians 4:8).

## "God is in Control"

What I'm about to say is controversial, but since we're confined to our houses, I feel more bold <grin>. There is a lot more to say about this than I have room for here, but I want to make a point or two that is relevant to these times.

Recently, I heard that a preacher (in a church of Christ) taught that the coronavirus was sent as a punishment by God. Really? How would he know that? If he subscribes to the "God controls everything, every hour of every day" school of thought, then it makes sense. But does God control "every molecule in the universe 24/7" as one Calvinist preacher said?

Given the frequency of the use of the phrase above, especially in social media, you would think that you could find it in the Bible somewhere. But you can't. In fact, "God" and "control" are not used in the same verse anywhere in the Bible.

If God controlling every molecule then free will is a fiction. If that's so, then we must conclude that God is responsible for every act good, bad or indifferent. And some Reformed religionists teach just that. Their view of God's sovereignty leads them to the conclusion that God's hand is in every decision, big or small, and every event, no matter how constructive or destructive it is.

God has controlled many things in the past (that are revealed in scripture) and controls what he wants to control now, but we don't know what those things are. If I ascribe things to God that are not revealed, then I am not speaking by faith (Romans 10:17).

Be careful when you say, "God is in control" because it may be that some tender soul is hearing "God caused my baby to die" and I know you don't leave that impression.

— dp

### What is the “Christian culture”?

“Culture” is a term that’s used in a several different ways and we have members who can speak more intelligently about it than I can. My thoughts are that of a layman. When I use the word “culture,” I use it to mean the attitudes and behavior characteristics of a particular social group. That’s the primary dictionary definition and it’s admittedly too broad because there are many variations within a particular “social group.”

For my purpose, I would say it is the *perceived* attitudes and behaviors of a particular social group. When we criticize or approve a “culture” we are making a judgment about that particular group’s values exhibited by their behavior. For example, in the 1960s, there was a social group known as the “hippies.” There were certain characteristics of the group — long hair, peace-loving, politically and morally liberal, and many loved old ty-dye VW vans decorated all over with paintings of flowers. Critics of that culture would describe them as lazy, immoral, pot-smoking deadbeats. “Culture” is in the eye of the beholder.

The same is true of Christians. That term “Christian” is so overused and abused that it has lost much of its meaning. And there are probably multiple perceptions of what we would call the “Christian culture.” I won’t even go into those because you can probably guess. I would just say that we are at a time in history when the term “Christian” is thought of negatively or not at all.

Even in the New Testament, there were different views of that “particular social group” called “Christians.” The term is used three times. Acts 11:26 says the disciples were first called “Christians” in Antioch; in Acts 26:28, Agrippa says, perhaps mockingly, “In a short you think you will persuade me to be a Christian?” In I Peter 4:16, Peter says that if we suffer as a Christian, we should not be ashamed.

If we just take just those passages as descriptive of the “Christian culture” we would describe them this way: they disciples — *followers* — of Jesus who attempt to persuade other people to follow Jesus and who are likely to suffer for Jesus. That’s actually a pretty good description of a *true* Christian and the rest of the book of Acts supports that. But it’s a far cry from how most people would describe “Christianity.”

This entry at [GotQuestions.com](http://GotQuestions.com) sums up the way most people view Christianity under the title of “Cultural Christianity.”

Cultural Christianity is religion that superficially identifies itself as “Christianity” but does not truly adhere to the faith. A “cultural Christian” is a nominal believer—he wears the label “Christian,” but the label has more to do with his family background and upbringing than any personal conviction that Jesus is Lord. Cultural Christianity is more social than spiritual. A cultural Christian identifies with certain aspects of Christianity, such as the good works of Jesus, but rejects the spiritual aspects required to be a biblically defined Christian. Some people consider themselves “Christians” because of family background, personal experience, country of residence, or social environment. Others identify as “Christian” as a way of declaring a religious affiliation, as opposed to being “Muslim” or “Buddhist.” [See entire article at <https://www.gotquestions.org/cultural-Christianity.html>]

When people “leave the church” we have to ask what they are leaving. Some are simply leaving a “church culture,” perceived or real. Perhaps they never really built faith in Jesus to begin with and therefore, were not really Christians.

The church also needs to look inward and ask if they have created (unintentionally) a culture that fits the description of the GotQuestions model instead of the Acts model. Has the church become a cultural social group that they call “Christian” instead of a Christ-following, Christ-honoring group? We have to recognize how easy it is to be conformed to the world, even against our best intentions.

What are some of the signs of a “cultural church of Christ,” besides those outlined at the GotQuestions website? Here are a few:

1. Preaching opinions as truth instead of preaching the text in context.
2. Making little things the big things (e.g, be more concerned about someone bringing coffee into the assembly than about her spiritual condition).
3. Teaching and preaching that is more “us” versus “them” than challenging “us” to conform to Jesus.
4. Teaching rules and commands but little teaching on grace.
5. Presenting the church (people) as if they are perfect (if they are, why do they need a “savior?”).
6. Teaching only topics that are socially acceptable but rarely teaching repentance and obedience to Jesus.
7. Acting as if we have all the answers to every question. Or attempting to find a conclusive answer when there is none.
8. Reducing commitment to Jesus to five hymns, the Lord’s Supper, 3 points and prayer.

What would you add?

dp