

# Preparing Souls To Serve The Lord

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## Crisis In The Church of Christ

By  
Jackie M. Stearsman

Informed readers should recognize that the title of this article is very significant. I know the difference between the concept of the church of Christ and that which is Denominationally termed the Church of Christ. The title of this article calls attention to a book that is dedicated to helping certain people facing a religious identity crisis to relate themselves to the religious community at large. The book critiqued is *The Cruciform Church* by C. Leonard Allen, published by Abilene Christian University Press. Page numbers will be given following the quoted material.

### Who Am I?

Inside the front cover is the following: "*Today Churches of Christ find themselves facing an identity crisis.*" Due to the limited space we have I cite one other passage from the preface to show that the author of the book and his publishers know that the "New Testament church" and "Christ's church" or the "church of Christ" is not the same as the "Church of Christ" in which they identify themselves. Read it carefully: "I

*chose the word [Cruciform, their modern name for their Church, JMS], however, because I believe it wonderfully and concisely conveys the vision of what Christ's church can and must be. I chose the word in hope that this image might become the dominant image by which Churches of Christ speak of identifying the New Testament church" (p. ix).*

When we have determined to depart from the teaching of the Bible we must make drastic changes in our religion. One of the first problems to face us is that of identity. Who are we and what will we call ourselves? How will people identify us? Faithful members of the church of Christ know who they are. They are no different in doctrine and practice from what is authorized by the Bible. They identify themselves by Bible names and they practice and endorse only that which is Biblically permitted (II John 9-11).

When we have problems accepting the Bible we will have difficulty with our terminology. There is no Denominational Church of Christ authorized in the Bible. When I use the term "Church of

Christ" in such a fashion, I am sure to have a problem with identity. When I write and speak the language of "Ashdod," informed people are going to try and figure out just who I am. Am I a member of the church of Christ? If I am why do I choose to call myself by a different name? If I am a member of the church of Christ why am I having an "identity crisis"?

The more any group redefines Biblical terms and uses them in ways the Bible never uses them there will be an identity crisis. It is no surprise that some have long seen a movement away from the Bible which one of their comrades labeled "A Big Sick Denomination." Others on the same road of babble and confusion try to identify the Lord's church among all Denominations. For this crowd there will be a mounting crisis of identity.

### Has The Faith Changed?

Is your system of religious doctrine (faith, or belief) in a constant state of flux, alteration, or change? It is with the "Cruciform"

crowd. Their words are: *"First, there is a simple fact that all religious traditions change from one generation to the next. Changes may be subtle, but the very process of passing on a set of beliefs inevitably alters them.* [Emphasis added, JMS] Thus, we find that Churches of Christ today are not the same as they were in the 1940s and 1950s and that those of the 1940s and the 1950s were significantly different from those of the 1870s" (p. 4).

The issue is not that tradition has changed. Rather, it is what is the meaning of the term "tradition?" There is some tradition that needs to be rejected and there is some tradition that must not be rejected. Tradition simply stated is "that which is passed on." Question: is that which we are passing on the Sacred Tradition or is it man made? Your Bible in the words of Paul demands that you *"Stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle; . . ."* (II Thess. 2:15). That same Bible warns you of being led astray by the traditions of men. *"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ"* (Col. 2:8).

Those who do not know the difference between the tradition that is to be held and that which is to be avoided are sure to have an identity crisis of major proportion.

The Church of Christ (Cruciform Church) has no Biblical basis for its existence. It is Denominational in philosophy. No one can keep it from being different in each decade and year of its existence. Faithful members of the church of Christ know that there have always been departures from the truth. No set of departures (or a single departure), in whatever decade we choose to cite, is the standard of direction for the church

of Christ. The doctrine of Christ is our standard, it must be, if we desire the approval of the Christ and our God (II John 9-11).

### Is It Possible To Be People of Integrity?

A most telling affirmation is underscored in the quote from page 4 of the ACU Book. Is it true that you can not pass on a set of religious beliefs without altering them? If this be true the sooner you stop passing on such altered beliefs the better for all concerned.

Why write and publish books that you are convinced no one can pass on to another without altering them? I find such statements baffling even boggling to the mind. Why would anyone write and publish a book, place in it a copyright worded as they do, if those who read it and pass it on will of necessity (can not keep from doing so) alter it? *"No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transcribed, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission from Abilene Christian University."*

Why would anyone having a semblance of intelligence have any interest in reading or hearing anything we had to say if we were so irresponsible with truth as this book asserts that they are. Given this position of passing on truth, should a sane judge in the courts of our land permit our testimony to have any influence upon his decision? Would the bank with whom you do business expect what you pass on to them to be in a constant state of flux? Does the medical profession expect the pharmacist to inevitably alter the prescription from the doctor?

Is what I pass on about God altered from what the Bible teaches? Is what I pass on about Christ altered? If you can not tell

then why bother with writing or speaking anything? To write or teach that doctrine is being altered is to imply the possibility of not altering it. To write or speak of altered doctrine is to imply that there is a standard to determine if what we are teaching has been altered or not. Is ACU going to reduce itself to "A Community of Uncertainty?"

The Bible teaches that *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16). In reading this you are reading what I have passed on to you. It is what God passed on to me in the passage cited. I have not altered it. I must, if honest and truthful, admit that if I can pass on one religious truth without altering it, then it is possible for me to pass on two, three, four, et al.

The truth has not changed. Some who handle the truth do change. Those who change and alter the truth will with each successive generation have a greater and greater identity crisis.

Do you know who you are spiritually? Are you responsible enough to speak and write the truth without altering it? Are you a member of the Cruciform Church?



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- 9:00 **Doctrine of Christ on Heaven**  
Bert Brown, Eustis, Florida
- 9:45 **Doctrine of Christ on the Home: Part I**  
V.P. Black, Chickasaw, Alabama
- 10:45 **Doctrine of Christ on God**  
Winfred Clark, Athens, Alabama
- 1:30 **Doctrine of Christ on Controversy**  
Terry M. Hightower, San Antonio, Texas
- 2:30 **Doctrine of Christ on the Crucifixion Part I**  
Kenneth Franklin, Brandon, Florida
- 3:30 **Doctrine of Christ on Forgiveness**  
Gene Stilwell, Sarasota, Florida
- 7:00 **Doctrine of Christ on the Church**  
Brian Kenyon, Friendship, Tennessee
- 7:45 **The Doctrine of Christ on Training Preachers**  
B.C. Carr, Lakeland, Florida

**Tuesday**

- 9:00 **Doctrine of Christ on Sin**  
Bruce Daugherty, Daytona Beach, Florida
- 9:45 **Doctrine of Christ on the Home: Part II**  
V.P. Black, Chickasaw, Alabama
- 10:45 **Doctrine of Christ on the Messiah**  
Winfred Clark, Athens, Alabama
- 1:30 **The Doctrine of Christ on Civil Government**  
Terry M. Hightower, San Antonio, Texas
- 2:30 **Doctrine of Christ on the Crucifixion Part II**  
Kenneth Franklin, Brandon, Florida
- 3:30 **Doctrine of Christ on the Traditions of Men**  
Jimmy Clark, Athens, Alabama
- 7:00 **Doctrine of Christ on Material Things**  
Edward Duffy, Lakeland, Florida
- 7:45 **Why We Support Florida School of Preaching**  
Tom Milianta, Clearwater, Florida

**Wednesday**

- 9:00 **Doctrine of Christ on Influence**  
Richard O'Connor, Munford, Alabama
- 9:45 **Doctrine of Christ on the Home: Part III**  
V.P. Black, Chickasaw, Alabama
- 10:45 **Doctrine of Christ on the Holy Spirit**  
Winfred Clark, Athens, Alabama
- 1:30 **Doctrine of Christ on Hell**  
Bradford Poe, Winter Park, Florida
- 2:30 **Doctrine of Christ on Righteousness**  
Jeff Clark, Columbiana, Alabama
- 3:30 **Doctrine of Christ on Law**  
Gary McDade, Memphis, Tennessee
- 7:00 **Doctrine of Christ on Miracles**  
Bernard Cooper, Lakeland, Florida
- 7:45 **Doctrine of Christ on Works**  
John Harris, Huntsville, Alabama

**Thursday**

- 9:00 **Doctrine of Christ on the Nature of Man**  
David Dominessy, Ocala, Florida
- 9:45 **Christ and His Doctrine**  
Adron Doran, Lexington, Kentucky
- 10:45 **Doctrine of Christ on Knowing the Truth**  
W.E. Wardlaw, Huntsville, Alabama
- 1:30 **Doctrine of Christ on Authority**  
John Harris, Huntsville, Alabama
- 2:30 **Doctrine of Christ on the Bible**  
Dumas Lafleur, Auburndale, Florida
- 3:30 **Doctrine of Christ on Grace**  
Gary McDade, Memphis, Tennessee
- 7:00 **Doctrine of Christ on the Great Commission**  
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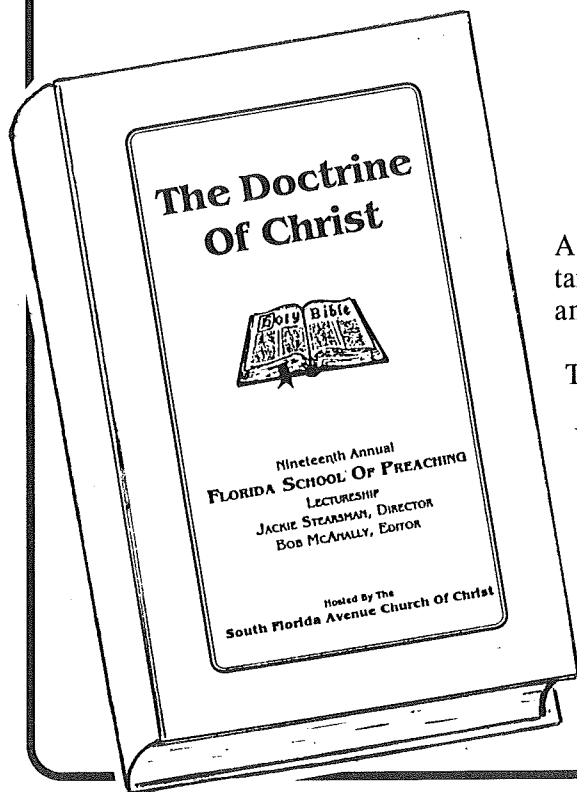
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