

# To the Ends of the Earth

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## A Holy Ghost Haircut

**Satan has used lies and racial stereotypes to divide and isolate us.**

Several weeks ago I decided to get a haircut while I was waiting for my daughter's car to be repaired. I looked across the street and saw a sign that read "HAIR" and figured I could try a new place for a change-even though I was unfamiliar with the neighborhood. When I walked in I realized it was a shop that catered to African-Americans.

Everyone in the salon was black, and they all gave me slightly puzzled stares when I came through the door. They probably weren't used to seeing middle-aged white guys come in this place too often.

I immediately smelled chemicals I'd never smelled before. About eight women were seated in chairs on the left side of the salon, and I soon learned that many of them had been there for two hours getting relaxer treatments or elaborate weaves. Several men were in the cramped lobby waiting for the one male stylist who specialized in men's hair.

I had an awkward choice to make. I could turn and walk out, and risk sending the message that I didn't want to be in a black hair salon. Or I could do what Jesus would do. I quickly decided that He had led me there.

I gave my name to the receptionist-a kind-faced, middle-aged woman who was carrying on a spirited conversation with one of

the female customers about her unexpected pregnancy. I was told that "Devon" would be cutting my hair when he finished with the four men in front of me.

I could feel the stares more intensely as I thumbed through worn copies of Ebony and Black Enterprise. The receptionist looked at me every minute or so with a nervous smile. I asked her about her large family and told her about my four teenage girls.

We suddenly had a lot in common.

While a wall-mounted television blared a rerun of The Proud Family, the whirring of hair clippers blended with a dozen conversations to make the room buzz. There was a sense of community in this place that I've never felt in the sterile suburban salon I visit once a month. These people knew one another, shared their family news and even swapped prayer requests.

I felt at home, but many questions were going through my mind. Do these folks even want me here? Will they laugh when I leave? Does Devon know how to cut a white guy's hair?

All the men in front of me were getting their heads shaved except one, who was having his hair platted in tiny patches and adorned with beads. I did not want beads, a shaved cut or a "low, low fade," which in black lingo means shorter than a buzz cut.

When I got in Devon's chair I immediately pushed past the awkwardness. "So is there really any difference when it comes to cutting black or white hair?" I asked.

Devon laughed. "No, man. It's all just hair." He laughed again when I admitted that I used Afro Sheen on my curls when I was a teenager in the 1970s.

Devon did a great job on my hair, and I told him I'd be back

again. Then I told the receptionist I hoped she would have no complications with her pregnancy. A lot of eyes followed me as I walked to the door.

Some of those people looked dumbfounded, as if I had broken an unwritten social rule. I just smiled and waved. It felt good to break some stereotypes-and make new friends in the process.

My experience that day reminded me that Jesus went out of His way to break social barriers. He even went to Samaria-a place no other kosher Jewish rabbi would dare visit. After He ministered to the divorced woman at the well, He stayed there two days-most likely eating Samaritan food, living in a Samaritan house and soaking in Samaritan culture (see John 4:40). Who knows? Maybe He even got a Samaritan-style haircut.

Satan has used lies and racial stereotypes to divide and isolate us. But when we cross ethnic and cultural lines and learn to spend time with one another, we discover how flimsy the devil's barriers really are. I hope you will venture outside your safety zone and start crashing through the cultural blockades that separate people in your community.

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**Don't Lose Your Edge**

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# We Need Tough Love

The Apostle Paul wrote the Bible's most eloquent words about Christian love. But when it came to the subject of heresy, he went into verbal-attack mode. He labeled those who were spreading false doctrines "dogs" (Phil. 3:2) and "liars" (1 Tim. 4:2), and he not only labeled heretics publicly but also "handed them over to Satan" in his prayers (see 1 Tim. 1:20, NASB). That doesn't sound much like the "sloppy agape" we often model today.

Paul believed that when heresy goes unchecked it contaminates everyone. He warned his disciple Timothy that false teaching spreads "like gangrene" (2 Tim. 2:17). "Gangrene" can also be translated cancer.

Modern translation: False doctrine is malignant. Get the tumor out before it kills people.

It troubles me that many charismatic and Pentecostal church leaders today are not displaying the necessary backbone to label a heretic a heretic. We have become masters at soft-pedaling and inaction when the Lord requires us to confront.

Case in point: Bishop Carlton Pearson, who was raised in the nation's largest Pentecostal denomination (the Church of God in Christ) and who once worked with the Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association, began teaching what he calls "the gospel of inclusion" a few years ago. He has become a Universalist, claiming that people do not need conversion in order to be saved by Christ.

Pearson's deception has been widely reported. In Charisma we followed Pearson's demise and announced that one organization, the Joint College of African-American Pentecostal Bishops'

Congress, labeled him a heretic in 2004. Since then Pearson has convened a national conference about Universalism that featured John Shelby Spong, an Episcopalian who affirms gay ordination and does not believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

You would think that every charismatic leader in the United States would sever ties to Pearson until he renounces his apostasy. But that is not the case.

- Popular gospel singer John P. Kee, who pastors New Life Fellowship Center in Charlotte, North Carolina, appeared on the program at Pearson's Inclusion 2005 conference, which was held in Pearson's Higher Dimensions Family church in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in June. Having Kee's face on the program certainly gave the conference added credibility in the eyes of gospel music lovers.
- Pearson was the featured speaker at Bishop Earl Paulk Jr.'s Atlanta-area church, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, in May. Paulk then put Pearson back in the same pulpit in October.
- The International Communion of Charismatic Churches (ICCC), which Paulk founded, still lists Pearson as a member. When I asked an ICCC leader why they did not remove him, he said the organization does not currently have any mechanism to restrict membership based on doctrinal or character issues.  
Huh? I think we've identified the root problem. In the loosey-goosey world of charismatic independence, we find it almost impossible to police our own. Everything is about "fellowship," but we lack the teeth in our policies to ensure that we can properly discipline

preachers who veer off into doctrinal error.

When I bring up the issue of Pearson's apostasy I usually get a lot of glazed looks from people who don't want to believe that a brother has fallen into deception. "Don't be so hard on the guy," is a typical response. "Maybe we don't understand his message."

I don't need any more explanation. Pearson has a banner on his Web site that announces "God Is Not A Christian." At press time, his church was to host a combined service on November 17 with a local Unitarian congregation in Tulsa. (Note: Unitarians are nice people, but they do not believe in the deity of Jesus.)

I'm sorry I sound harsh. But I would not be walking in the love of God if I weren't willing to issue this warning in order to protect vulnerable people. Sometimes we have to be willing to offend. "Love your brother" does not mean, "Always be nice."

We Christians don't know how to handle it when the Bible requires tough love. It's time for all of our congregations, denominations and church networks to raise the bar and defend the faith from those who pervert it.

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# **Katrina's Silver Lining**

**God can use even the darkest tragedy as a backdrop to showcase His mercy.**

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## **How the Devil Hides in Religion**

**Has the American church given the devil a place to hide?**

Nobody I know has ever taken a photograph of the devil, and we couldn't find a recent snapshot to use on the cover of Charisma this month. The only images we located were paintings, drawings and a few sculptures—all based on artists' notions of what the Evil One must look like.

I certainly was not inclined to pursue an interview or a photo-shoot, since I really don't care to see Satan in person. But for the sake of journalistic accuracy I need to inform our readers that the red-faced monster we featured on our cover is probably not a realistic depiction.

Most of us tend to think of the devil as a grotesque creature: a half-man, half-reptile with forked tongue, goatee, black fingernails and creepy, Darth Vaderlike voice (and bad breath of the sulfuric variety). He's like all the things we feared most when we were kids: Dracula, Freddy Krueger or any twisted character played by Vincent Price. Kids today might give the "Most Like Satan" award to the dark wizard Saruman from The

Lord of the Rings films.

But the issue for us is not whether the devil has pointed ears or carries a pitchfork. Regardless of his real appearance, he is a master of disguise. That's what makes him so dangerous.

We Christians are always on the lookout for the devil's work. But it seems we spend way too much energy looking in the wrong places for his fingerprints.

A few years ago, for example, some Christians worked overtime to inform parents about the evils of Pokémon, claiming that Satan was plotting to take over the minds of children by using a Japanese cartoon. That was only after another group of Christians circulated a warning that a major U.S. household-products company was controlled by devil worshipers. (It wasn't.)

Today, many believers act as if the Harry Potter books are hell's primary tools to infiltrate our families with witchcraft.

I don't buy that. Satan is much more subtle.

The apostle Paul, who wrestled with plenty of demonic powers in his day, told us that we must know our enemy in order to outwit him. One thing we must understand is that the devil's primary target is the church—so he snoops around there a lot.

He comes "as an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14, NASB) and is an imposter who claims to speak for God. He can mimic piety. He's OK with choir robes, clerical collars and the whole Sunday morning routine. He knows how to dress to fit in.

He detests genuine praise music that exalts God, but he's fine when he can turn worship into dead formality or manipulate it in a fleshly way to glorify the performer. He hates the Bible (because he must bow to its authority), but he has impressive knowledge of the Scriptures and can twist them to create false

doctrines.

He despises preachers, but if he can tempt them to embrace greed or arrogance (or lure them into denominational politics), he can use them like puppets on a string. He hates it when Christians love each other, so he uses every trick in his bag to trigger jealousy, strife, divorce and painful church splits.

The apostle Paul didn't seem too concerned about the devil's influence in pagan culture. He was much more alarmed that Satan had infiltrated the church without anyone's knowing it.

"Who has bewitched you?" he asked the Galatians (Gal. 3:1). He told the Corinthians: "I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3).

Has the American church given the devil a place to hide? Satan thrives on religious hypocrisy. He also loves backbiting, pride, greed, selfish ambition and hidden perversion. As long as we tolerate such things, we create an atmosphere of spiritual compromise that attracts the enemy and gives him a safe haven.

Religious people don't even realize they are part of this evil plot. But radical Christians who are full of the Holy Ghost must go on the offensive, chase Satan down, invade his territory and liberate his captives. When our masked enemy is faced with a church that walks in genuine love, Christlike humility, bold authority and biblical faith, he must tuck his scaly tail between his legs and run.

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# Pray With Desperation

**NOBODY IN MY FAMILY** watches Desperate Housewives. My wife and I are raising four teenage daughters, so the last thing we need is a sleazy prime-time soap opera about suburban women who consider adultery an acceptable way to cure boredom.

No thanks. I'll change the channel.

On the other hand, I do want my girls to grow up to be desperate. Not like the women who live on the fictional Wisteria Lane, but more like Hannah—the Bible's original desperate housewife. We could use a big dose of her desperation today.

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# I Was a Teenage Prodigal

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# Are We There Yet?

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# **30 Emerging Voices**

**Who will lead the church in the next decade? These young Christian leaders, all 40 or younger, represent THE FUTURE OF THE AMERICAN CHURCH.**