

4 Ways to Cure the Church's Identity Crisis

The Christian church in the United States is suffering an identity crisis.

It is more painful to watch than when a 13-year-old boy or girl is wrestling with acne and being gawky while trying to find their true worth and value.

When I came to the saving grace of Jesus Christ in July 1964, the church knew exactly who she was because there was absolute certainty of her faith and doctrine. Clear demarcations distinguished the difference between those churches who were Christian, those churches who had departed from the faith and those who were cults.

Their publications, radio broadcasts, journals and periodicals made obvious their identity and proudly proclaimed their distinction. There were no quasi members of the Christian faith. You were either a born-again child of God or you were lost and going to hell.

The standards of piety were certain. A born-again child of God left the "old life" behind. A Christian did not use foul language or alcohol of any kind. There certainly was no "hooking up" on Christian college campuses or anywhere else for that matter. Right and wrong were understood because the Christian pulpits of the land clearly preached the difference between the holy and the unholy; the sacred and the carnal; the godly and the ungodly. The Ten Commandments were still posted in the Sunday school classrooms, and everyone knew they were not 10 good suggestions. They were, indeed, God's commandments! They were not debated, manipulated or rewritten.

God had spoken!

Christian church, USA 2016, is out of focus. We don't know who we are.

The pressure for political correctness and tolerance demands she compromise her doctrine.

The great desire for popular acceptance combined with 40 years of a church growth paradigm that is out of balance has dressed the church for success but left her preening contemporary music, stage presence and a megachurch format. It has also left the church populace weak in spirit, biblically illiterate, and completely uncertain as to what it means to be Christian.

The result is disastrous. Many who fill the pews in a Christian church on Sunday believe all religions are just different ways of seeking the same God. Unfortunately, they are not alone. There are Christian college professors and pastors who believe Muslims, Mormons and Christians worship the same God.

Larycia Hawkins, former professor at Wheaton College, donned a hijab as part of her advent worship. She posted on her Facebook page: "I stand in religious solidarity with Muslims because they, like me, a Christian, are people of the book. And as Pope Francis said last week we worship the same God."

The demand for tolerance and years of moral relativity in our education system have weakened the church's resolve for absolute truth. Combine that with historical rewrite; postmodern apologetics; and a weakened acceptance for the infallibility of the Holy Scriptures, the foundation of the church has been softened. The call for greater tolerance is now being heard from within the Christian community, not just from the liberal activists.

A new definition of tolerance was recently given to me by my wife, Wanda. She said, "Tolerance is allowing others to believe a lie; while you give up the right to speak the

truth.”

That is exactly what many in the Christian church are doing.

The Christian community is left swaying between points of moral relativity. Our congregations are filled with worshippers on Sunday who were entertaining themselves just the night before with movies containing nudity, F-bombs and extreme violence; social drinking; and maybe even fornication. Yet, they come Sunday morning singing and worshipping God with the belief they are pleasing to Him.

“The Christian church is just reflecting today’s culture of the USA,” some will say. Is that what the church is supposed to reflect, or is that, more correctly, a refraction?

Jesus said the church is to be light in this dark world. It is to be a refuge to which the world can run and find God; receive hope, experience salvation and deliverance and learn true holiness.

There is a certain cure for this identity crisis the Christian church is now suffering.

1. Turn our face back to Father. Take a careful and long look at Him who gave us birth. The church should be a reflection of the one who gave her life.

2. Sit at His feet and listen to His instruction. Hear His Words clearly and know for certain they are infallible and relevant to all cultures of all generations. The church has been given the grave responsibility to guard and defend the faith.

3. Sit in His presence looking upon His face and listening to His Word speaking until a holy fear is born in our hearts. The church is to fear the Lord, not be His buddy.

4. The fear of the Lord will deliver us from the fear of man. It will teach the church to hate evil, pride and arrogance,

the evil way and the perverse mouth.

Then the church will know for certain who she is, what she believes and why she is here. The church will once more do ministry to please Father, not to please the crowds. The power of the Holy Spirit will again be upon her and life-giving ministry will return.

Dr. F. Dean Hackett *has served in full-time Christian ministry since October 1971. He has ministered throughout the United States, Canada and Europe, serving as pastor, conference speaker and mentor. He has planted four churches, assisted in planting 15 others, and currently serves as lead pastor of Living Faith Church in Hermiston, Oregon. Dr. Hackett founded Spirit Life Ministries International in 2001 to facilitate ministries in Croatia and Bosnia Herzegovina and to open a training center for workers in those nations. You can find him at F. Dean Hackett – Foundational, Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest.*