

August, 2004

Pause Ponder Profit

Ten Dominant Moods In American Religion

By Warren Berkley

This article is an effort to identify ten dominant moods in American religion today. I have no purpose to exhaust every possible trend and things change so quickly today this list will soon be outdated. Nevertheless, consider what is happening in America today:

1. Non-judgmental; resistant to discipline. Cultural pluralism and the pressure of being politically/religiously correct results in exalting as a principle, the spirit of being "non-judgmental." Whatever anybody wants to do about anything or everything, there is cultural pressure to relax, be accepting and never ask anyone to examine their beliefs and behavior. Yet the kindest thing you can do for anyone is tell them the truth. And *"those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear,"* (1 Tim. 5:20). Sentimental silence is the best friend sin ever had. The friendly, diplomatic spirit toward error hastens the progress of apostasy, in whatever form it may assume.

2. Subjection, Emotional. That which is subjectively based proceeds from or takes place in a person's mind, rather than from an external, objective source. When you do what you think and feel, rather than believe and obey the Word of God, the basis of your religious life is subjective and emotional; therefore, relative to how you feel at anytime. *"But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does,"* (Jas. 1:25).

3. Coveting Excitement, Entertainment, Drama, and Style. With the advent of television, movies and internet media, there is greater demand for visual, external excitement. To be entertained is "more fun" than reading and studying. So we are constantly working on ways to supply more dazzle, sometimes with a loss of scriptural content. Popular worldly methods are being demanded in religious settings. Our commitment must be as Paul expressed: *"we preach Christ crucified,"* (see 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5).

4. Ecumenical. The ecumenical spirit is to accept everybody as brothers and sisters, without regard to differing teaching and practice, as "the loving thing." With only a confession of your faith in Christ accompanied by some involvement in "Evangelical religion", the ecumenists embrace you with a claim of joint fellowship. "Unity in diversity" is the plea, and the discernment between truth and error required by Scriptures is set aside. Though not in a religious setting, Rodney King's statement during the LA Riots captures the premise of ecumenical religion: "Why can't we all just get along?" Of course we can, but how? The desire for unity can only be fulfilled by letting God's truth be our authority.

(Continued on page 2)



By our commitment to what God's Holy Spirit has revealed, we can effectively endeavor *"to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,"* (Eph. 4:3).

5. Informal, Casual. Comfort has been put above reverence in our age. Being casual, relaxed and sporty it is argued is of greater significance than being reverent, fitting, appropriately dressed. Society is in a dress down, casual mode. The danger lies in the message that worship is just like anything else. A change in dress code generally signals a change in attitude. Are we willing to regard worship with a leisure attitude? *"Guard your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil,"* (Eccl. 5:1).

6. The Social Gospel. Interests in serving social needs and financing social causes is a ruling power in American religion. Today, the social gospel is alive in churches with social and benevolent programs to make this world a better place to live through counseling, physical fitness, various kinds of therapy, community involvement and sometimes political activism. Paul had a plan far more comprehensive and reaching to the cause of man's problem: *"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek,"* (Rom. 1:16).

7. Biblical Ignorance. In American religion today, there is little interests in serious Bible study. Researchers George Galiup and Jim Castelli concluded, "Americans revere the Bible but, by and large, they don't read it, they have become a nation of biblical illiterates," (www.crosswalk.com/faith/1218766.html - by Albert Mohler). Only when we read, can we enjoy a true knowledge of the mystery of Christ (Eph.3:4).

8. Less preaching. Is preaching "a dying art?"

In some places there is movement away from preaching toward a more popular (relevant?), multi-media presentation. There is a mood that seeks to gradually replace preaching with some form where entertainment and audience appeal has a higher place than instruction (diminishing the need to *"convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching,"* 2 Tim. 4:2). Talks that make people feel good enjoys greater popularity than the boldness of divine truth.

9. Worldly. To be worldly means to find your life in what the world offers instead of what God offers in Christ. To be worldly means, to seek the temporal thrills, ambitions and pleasures, with that priority ranked above godliness. Those captivated by the world may have "a form of godliness," but by their attachment to the world they deny its power. *"And from such people turn away,"* (2 Tim. 3:5).

10. Misplaced emphasis on Numbers. Bigger is better. The emphasis on numbers leads directly to the introduction of modern marketing strategy into the church. The outcome is, we sell customer satisfaction instead of preaching the gospel. Instead of being followers of Christ, we follow the crowd and give them what they want to increase our attendance and contribution (so we can enlarge the crowd). Instead of worshipping in Spirit and truth, we adapt our worship to the changing needs of the public. This inordinate emphasis on numbers eventually let's men determine the work of the church instead of God. *"The tendency to make Christianity fashionable, and carnally respectable, must be met at the cost of sneer and ridicule from any quarter,"* (Millennial Har., 1868).

If these "moods" I have identified can be viewed as soil, it is rich and fertile to receive the Charismatic seed. It is ripe to regenerate

Two “Churches of Christ”?

By Steve Wallace

While speaking to the elders of the church at Ephesus Paul said, “Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:30). When this came to pass, it would result in at least two groups emerging from what had been the church at Ephesus: those who continued to faithfully follow the Lord, and those who followed after men. Further, it is often the case that those who apostatize continue to profess religion (Cf. 1 Kgs. 12:26-33; 2 Thess. 2:3, 4). If this happened at Ephesus, the result would be two churches in town — one right and the other wrong. If you came to Ephesus, how would you decide which church to be a part of? Remember, both could trace their origins to the apostle Paul’s preaching. The only thing you could do is take your Bible out and see which one was keeping harmony with it.

1. Such things as “First Principles” and the “Church Name” would be insufficient standards to measure by. Inasmuch as Christians would be drawing away disciples from “the flock” of v. 29, the two groups could both consist of baptized believers and teach the truth on how one is saved from sin. They could both call themselves “the Church of Christ.” Modern day Christian churches which baptize believers and take on the name of “Church of Christ” (many do) show that such a scenario is not farfetched. The simple point that we seek to make here is that one can follow men and still teach parts of God’s will. In such instances one cannot say someone is wrong for teaching what truth they do. They are wrong wherein they have departed from the truth and followed men.

2. You would have to compare what each church is teaching with the New Testament. Inasmuch as Paul expounded “all the counsel of

would want the same in your seeking the true church. You would want to hear what a church taught with reference to such moral questions as drunkenness, homosexuality, divorce and remarriage, etc., and compare it with the Scriptures (Matt. 19:8, 9; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10). This would also be the case in doctrinal matters. You would open your Bible to compare what is written therein to what a given church taught. Jesus’ words of Matthew 15:9 tell us that His word must be taught on all matters: “But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”

3. You would have to compare each church’s activities with the New Testament. The Bible teaches us the danger of “saying and doing not” (Matt. 23:3; Titus 1:16). We realize, therefore, that it is not enough for a group of brethren to simply claim to be a true church, or to say that they recognize Christ as their head, or to profess belief in the Bible principles such as the oversight of elders, or the autonomy of the local church, etc. When it came to the church’s activities, you would want book, chapter, and verse for everything the church was involved in (Col. 3:17; Acts 20:32; 2 Jn. 9). This is born of the realization that Christ can only be “head over all things” to a church if that church submits to Him in all things (Eph. 1:22, 23).

Conclusion

Such a scenario as we have sought to picture in this article exists today. Churches of Christ exist that teach and practice different things from one another. Do you want to be just a Christian? Do you want to be just a member of Jesus’ church and nothing more? Please, follow the steps we have outlined herein.

Come Worship With Us

(Continued from page 2)

Calvinism and advance Ecumenism, with every attending error. To the extent these things play out among us, we stand at risk and the next generation stands at even greater risk. The answer is, teaching and practicing the inspired, sufficient Word. "I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all the sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

That Considerate

Lady," said the panhandler, as he asked for a quarter, "You won't believe this, but I once had a lovely looking wife like you and I wasn't contented. I had an ornery disposition and kicked and complained around the house so much that I made her miserable. Finally, I got disgusted with myself and left home."

"Well," said the woman opening her purse, "I'll give you a dollar. Not very many husbands are that considerate" (*Nuggets*, February 1963).

In every city where there are several congregations there is always the problem of petty, childish members who, when they cannot have their way or get too little attention, "move their membership." Do not be disturbed when this happens, "rather give thanks" that they were "that considerate." (By James W. Adams, from his book, *Words Fitly Spoken*)



Non-profit Org.
U. S. Postage Paid
Permit # 356
Paragould, AR

**Second and Walnut
Church Of Christ**
400 N. 2nd St.
P. O. Box 356
Paragould, AR 72451

Pause — Ponder — Profit is a monthly publication of the Second and Walnut Church Of Christ, Paragould, Arkansas.

Sunday
Radio 1490 AM . 9:00 A.M.
Bible Study 9:45 A.M.
Worship..... 10:45 A.M.
Worship..... 6:00 P.M.
Wednesday
Bible Study..... 7:00 P.M.

Preacher: James A. Brown
Phone: 870-236-3371
E-Mail: jabrown@grmco.net