

Don't Judge a Book By Its Cover

By Jason Hilburn

When I was growing up, I had somewhat of an interest in books. When I would go to a bookstore or a library, I would practically always choose a book that had a nice looking cover. I admit that sometimes I would not even begin to read the book – I was often content merely to have the interesting looking book in my possession!

I sometimes wonder if this is the way many people today think about religion. It seems as if many people pick out the religion which looks the most appealing to them, and they keep it, without ever really investigating what is on the inside.

There are many factors which can make a certain religious body have an attractive "cover," such as a beautiful building, a large membership, a charismatic preacher, friendly members, members who are well-known in the community, and plenty of activities in which to be involved. I wonder if a person were to investigate and find serious error taught inside that beautiful building, would it even matter to him? Are we more concerned about the cover than the contents? Are we merely concerned with the outward aesthetics of religion, rather than the true heart and core of it?

Even though truth and love should be our main concerns, it seems that truth has taken a backseat when it comes to criteria for "choosing a church." If we were concerned about the contents rather than the cover, we would be asking questions such as:

- 1) Is this church found anywhere in the Bible? (Such as "the churches of Christ salute you" – Romans 16:16; Matthew 16:18).
- 2) Is this church the one church Jesus Christ died to establish, or was it founded by someone else at a later date? (In the first century A.D. Jesus died to establish His church, the one body of the saved – Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 5:23).
- 3) Does one have to be a member of this church to be saved? (The Bible teaches that all the saved are in Christ's one church, therefore all those outside of Christ's church are lost! – Acts 2:47; Ephesians 5:23).
- 4) Do they use Scriptural names for themselves as individuals, and as a group? (We are commanded to speak as the Scriptures speak to glorify God – 1 Peter 4:11, 16; Every word should be said with Christ's authority – Colossians 3:17; Man-made names cause sinful divisions – 1 Corinthians 1:10-13).
- 5) Does the preacher give the Scriptural Plan of salvation? It seems that most preachers teach the sinner's prayer, which is not in the Bible. The Bible says: Hear the Word – Romans 10:17; Believe in Christ – John 8:24; Repent of sins – Acts 17:30; Confess Christ before men – Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:10; Be immersed into Christ for the remission of sins – Romans 6:3-5; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Be faithful – 1 John 1:6—2:6; Revelation 2:10.
- 6) Do they "rightly divide the Word" and teach "sound doctrine," or do they "pervert the Gospel" and "twist the Scriptures to their own destruction"? (2 Timothy 2:15; Titus 2:1; 1 Timothy 4:16; Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Peter 3:16).
- 7) Do they follow the New Testament pattern for worship? (a capella singing – Colossians 3:16-17; Ephesians 5:19; preaching the Word – Acts 20:7; praying to the Father – Ephesians 5:20; weekly communion – Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:20; 16:2; giving – 1 Corinthians 16:1-2).
- 8) Do they have New Testament authority for everything they do? (Colossians 3:17).
- 9) Do they understand that we are no longer under the Old Testament law and Old Testament ways of worship? (John 4:20-24; Colossians 2:14-17; Hebrews 8:13; 10:9, etc.).

Of which church are you a member? Make sure you examine the contents – not just the cover! God will hold us accountable for having fellowship with or bidding Godspeed to those who persist in error (Ephesians 5:11; 2 John 10-11; Romans 16:17; John 7:24; 1 John 4:1). Become a member of the Lord's true church, live faithfully, and worship regularly with a faithful church of Christ in your area (Romans 16:16; Hebrews 10:23-31).

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