

SHOULD WE DISPLAY A CROSS IN OR ON OUR BUILDINGS?

Dear Bro John: My Church has recently placed two life sizes Cross's at the rear of our auditorium. Small slat like shingles were supplied so those desiring could write their sin on these and nail them to the cross. Needless to say both cross's are so full of these there is no room to nail another slat. This is the only Church of Christ I have ever attended that displayed a Cross for any reason. When I posed the question to an Elder..His answer was..the young people like it and it keeps them coming back. I get the same response concerning foot stomping and hand clapping during singing. J C

Dear Bro. J C: I will answer your question from two angles. The question is, "Is it wrong for a congregation to display a cross on or in their building?" For many years it has been a rare congregation that had a cross on the outside of their building or displayed within. The reasoning of this practice cannot be found in Scripture. Nothing in scripture forbids such. It was a reaction to the practices of the various denominational churches around us. More specifically it was a reaction to the Roman Catholic churches that place crosses in their sanctuaries and bow and pray before them and the images on them. They also hold them in superstitious reverence to ward off evil. Over the years this rejection became a pretty strong tradition among our people.

While we have not displayed crosses on our buildings, we have had our crosses. We frequently see them imprinted on our Bibles and hymnals. They are often used as handles on our communion ware. We see them in our Bible School literature and on our wall posters and bulletin boards. Our preachers sometimes display them on chalk boards or slides when preaching about the crucifixion. We sing about the cross, the mention it in our prayers and sermons. In my judgment it no more wrong for us to have a permanent cross on our building than to have one imprinted on our hymnals or drawn to illustrate our sermons. It is just a matter of understanding and getting use to the practice.

The second part to your question has to do with encouraging brethren to write their sins on a piece of paper and pin them to the cross. Often preachers encourage Christians who are struggling with some temptation or sin to write their sins on paper along with Scriptures to help them in overcoming them. In days past they were not encouraged to nail them to a decorative cross. While this act, in and of itself, does not violate any particular scripture I can think of, I would question it on two bases. Is it adequate to justify any practice of the church on the basis that the young people want this, therefore we must provide it? I think not. The far more important question is, "What does Christ want from us?" This practice is most likely only one of a package of steps that lead away from the simple worship of God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). It is leading folks toward the acceptance of all sorts of denominational practices the leaders think and hope will enhance the devotion and faithfulness of their people. My immediate question would be, what is next? Where are you going with this? We live in a day when average members seem to be so carnal-minded that the simple worship of God with hymns, prayers, communion and Bible study seems to do nothing for their jaded hearts. They need and crave some sort of stimulant to stir up their spirits and make them interested in spiritual things. Rather than provide our members these emotional stimulants we need to provide them serious Bible teaching that will educate and inform them about what it means to be a Christian and how God's Word implanted in the honest heart (Jas. 1:21) and His indwelling Spirit (Acts 2:38; Gal. 5:22) can provide us all things that pertain to life and godliness.(II Pet. 1:3). Such practices as these are being borrowed from the Charismatic churches rather than from the Bible.

When considering things that will help and encourage young people, elders should also weigh how those things will be received by older members. If they are offensive to the conscience of others they should not be introduced (I Cor. 9:13).

JHW