

The Culture of the House

Standards we hold for members at our churches

By Pastor Kellen Brooks

If you grew up in an “old school” home like me (a home that held to traditional standards and values) there were probably some “house” rules that you abided by. As I reflect on the time growing up in my grandparents home and even the experiences of others, some of those standards come to mind. Things like:

- Lights out by midnight on Saturday.
- If you’re leaving town, let us know where you’re going.
- Take off your shoes when you come into the house.
- Don’t leave dishes in the sink at night.
- Finish your school work before you turn on the television.
- Be ready for church on Sunday, Tuesday, and Friday.
- Don’t sit in the big chair

We know that these rules in the house were not issues of salvation and had no bearing on our Christianity. However, these were the rules of the house that were set in order to ensure that those living there could live peaceably, comfortably, and in a way that shows love, care, and concern for each other. It was the “culture of the house” or “how we do things around here.”

The church in Acts experienced a similar event. In the early days of the church, there was a blended identity. Jews were becoming believers in Jesus Christ and the gospel was also spreading to other nations of people. The Jews who became Christians came into Christianity already having a religious identity and rules that governed their lifestyle. For several Jews, it was hard for them to accept that people could bypass their laws and restrictions and become part of the family of God simply by placing faith in Jesus Christ. This belief caused much dissension within the church, and some Jews even started teaching that you had to embrace the laws of Moses, including the painful act of circumcision, in order to be saved.

To resolve the issue and create peace in the Church, James, who served as a chief leader in the church made a list of prohibitions which were Scriptural and cultural.

Acts 15:19-20

19 “And so my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. 20 Instead, we should write and tell them to abstain from eating food offered to idols, from sexual immorality, from eating the meat of strangled animals, and from consuming blood.

We say this was both Scripture and cultural because scripture forbids sexual immorality. That command transcends culture. But the dietary restriction was Scriptural but not

binding. Because it was no longer binding, we say it is cultural. In Christ's teachings, all foods were declared to be clean and acceptable to eat. If one eats by giving thanks to God, the food could be consumed, even if it was once prohibited in the Scriptures (Mark 7:19; Acts 10:15; 1 Timothy 4:4).

The point we are drawing from this passage is that there are both Scriptural and cultural things we hold to in our churches for the betterment of our Christian community.

As members of the Church Of God In Christ, we teach the concept of being sanctified, which means to be set apart from sinful things by God in order to be used by Him. We see ourselves as set apart from the world (the sinful ideas and practices) hence, there are certain standards that we hold and behaviors that we encourage members to avoid to show their separation from the world and assist their positive witness to those they come in contact with.

Gambling

All members are encouraged to avoid gambling in all its forms, including but not limited to raffles, lotteries, card and dice games; slot machines, sweepstake tickets, betting on sporting events or casino indulgence. Gambling "feeds upon human weaknesses and contributes to the desire to get something for nothing"¹ Honest work that generates income and does not harm others in the process is encouraged (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

Drugs

We discourage the use of any drugs, including but not limited to smoking, hookahs, pipes or any device that mimics drug use (i.e. e-cigarettes); injections, and medicine abuse. We disdain the consumption of alcoholic beverages and teach total abstinence of alcohol (Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-32; Isaiah 5:11, 22; Romans 14:21; Ephesians 5:18; Titus 2:3). Our chief pastor in the church of God in Christ, Presiding Bishop J. Drew Sheard teaches,

Warnings against drunkenness include not only the indulgence in wine, but all liquors and drugs that alter the mental and emotional state and make us vulnerable to temptation and evil.²

Profanity/Negative Speech

¹ Range, C. F. and Young, Clyde. *Church Of God In Christ Official Manual*, Board of Publication of the Church Of God In Christ, 1973.

² J. Drew Sheard. *Say it. Tell it. Live it. An inspiring and uplifting 52 week devotional*. Urial Press. Harrison Mason Press. Bloomington, IN. 2023.

Life and death is in the power of the tongue and we teach members to abstain from cursing/profanity, gossip, and sowing seeds of discord through negative talk about brothers and sisters to others (Ephesians 4:29; Ephesians 5:4; Exodus 20:7; 2 Thessalonians 3:11). We encourage truth telling, conflict resolution (Matthew 18), and reconciliation.

Marriage

What do we believe about marriage?

We affirm marriage between a man and a woman as prescribed in the Holy Scriptures.

Why do we affirm this?

We affirm this because God created them male and female and gave them the command to be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth and to connect deeply to each other in a marital relationship (Gen. 1:28; Genesis 2:24).

What did patriarchs, Jesus and God the Father say about marriage?

The patriarch Abraham affirmed heterosexual marriage to a person of like faith by requesting that his servant find a wife for Isaac, his son, from among his own kindred and not from the Canaanites who did not practice the same faith or worship the one true God (Genesis 24:3, 4).

Jesus affirms permanent, heterosexual marriage. He quoted from Genesis 2 and taught that a man leaves his parents and joins as one with his wife in a union that God has fused together (Matthew 19:4-6).

God the Father affirms permanent, heterosexual marriage as citing his hatred for divorce (Malachi 2:16).

What do the apostles and other scriptures say about marriage and homosexual behavior?

The apostles affirm permanent, heterosexual marriage and give extensive examples of what a Spirit filled and Christ-centered marriage looks like (Ephesians 5:21-28; Titus 1:6).

Same-sex behaviors are condemned in both the Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures and no allowance is ever made for its acceptance (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26-29; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Jude 1:7).

The Assemblies of God church fellowship position paper on *Homosexuality, Marriage, and Sexual identity*, resonates with our beliefs:

...there is absolutely no affirmation of homosexual activity, same-sex marriage, or changes in sexual identity found anywhere in Scripture. Male and female genders are carefully defined and unconfused. The consistent ideal for sexual experience in the Bible is chastity for those outside a monogamous heterosexual marriage and fidelity for those inside such a marriage. There is also abundant evidence that homosexual behavior, along with illicit heterosexual behavior, is immoral and comes under the judgment of God.³

In addition to these behaviors, we also encourage members to abstain from the sinful behaviors that are openly condemned in the Bible for believers (Galatians 5:19-21; I Corinthians 6:9-11).

Why do we hold these positions?

The reason for our stance on these issues is so that:

- (1) the Christian will be enabled to live a life above reproach, which is a life that can be approved, commended by and emulated by others (Titus 1:6).
- (2) We will avoid the judgment and banning from the Kingdom of God that comes with engaging in sinful behaviors (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)
- (3) the Christian will live a life of enjoyment, peace and freedom in Christ (Psalm 100:2; Galatians 5:1; Romans 6:15-23)

We hold a firm stance on such matters, because of the potential detrimental impact on the character and physical body of the believer. Our testimony as believers is hindered when we engage in these activities. In accordance with the Scriptures, our lives are to be pure and unspotted so that we may be effective witnesses to a lost world (James 1:26-27). If you struggle with such vices, ministers are available for prayer and support. In addition to spiritual guidance, the church also encourages members with these struggles to seek professional help in the form of counselors and programs.

³ <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/Homosexuality-Marriage-and-Sexual-Identity>