



Jeff Sweeten

Thus Saith the Lord
is presented by the

Park Heights Church of Christ

1300 E. Boynton St.
Hamilton
254-386-3953

Schedule of Services

SUNDAY

9:30 a.m. Bible Class
10:25 a.m. Morning Worship
1:30 p.m. Afternoon Worship

WEDNESDAY

7:00 p.m. Bible Study

Please call or email if you
have a question or comment
254-386-3953

jeffdsweeten@gmail.com or
chelejones24@yahoo.com

Website:
www.parkheightscoc.com

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CULTURAL SHADES

By Jeff Sweeten

A woman from Maine was visiting her family at Christmastime in a small town in the south. She was surprised to find in the town square a crèche with the Three Wise Men wearing firefighter's helmets. At a nearby church, she stopped and asked the secretary why the Three Wise Men were wearing helmets. She said she couldn't recall reading anything about firefighters in the Bible when Jesus was born. "You Yankees never read the Bible!" the women said, angrily. She took out a Bible, flipped through some pages, and pointed at a passage. "Look!" she said. "It says right here, 'The Three Wise men came from *afar*.'" (Holy Hilarity, p. 21-22).

We Southerners appreciate the uniqueness of our language, even though it falls prey to puns now and again. Some have even taken it upon themselves to author books about "Speaking Southern" in order to clarify the confusion. It is ironic, though, that in attempting to clarify everything from "Ebonics" to "Southern Slang," proper English is employed; implying, of course, that there is a correct way to convey verbal messages and that "standard" English is the standard.

Correct word-usage may be viewed by some as a minor detail in Christian doctrine, but more often, it is the defining distinction in religious divisions. Misunderstandings usually occur when a term or phrase is removed from its context and assigned a cultural or convenient meaning foreign to its Divine definition. Updating definitions to accommodate our cultural usage of a term can change the message of the Bible. Take for instance the story above: the term "church" has come to mean "building." This definition is foreign to God's Word. Did Jesus die for an architecturally designed pile of bricks (Acts 20:28)? This may seem petty but minor concessions quickly become major convictions. Adultery becomes "living together," sodomy becomes an "alternate lifestyle," infanticide becomes "planned parenthood," drunkenness becomes a "disease," and "codependency" excuses everything God defines as *sin*.

If we claim to be God's people, we must speak "*as the oracles of God*" (1 Peter 4:11). To do otherwise is to invite confusion, misunderstanding, false doctrine, and ultimately, damnation. In catering to the culture of redefinition, we become a flashback of Isaiah's nightmare, "*Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!*" (Isaiah 5:20). In the latest manifestation of the depths to which our society has fallen, the LA Dodgers invited a militant, abhorrent group of sexual deviants to their stadium to publicly receive an award for conduct that is perverse, even when done in the strictest privacy. This is a redux of Sodom and Gomorrah and indicative of the condemnation our current culture is deserving. It is well past time to stand up and call a sin what it is: sin.

God said, "*All the words of my mouth are in righteousness*" (Proverbs 8:8). We won't know "righteousness" unless we are willing to use His words; it's hard to read through cultural shades.