

# Do you still focus on the messenger?

*This article is from the "Among Friends" section of the Church of God Big Sandy's Web site, churchofgodbigandy.com. It was posted for the weekend of Nov. 14-15.*

**By Dave Havir**

BIG SANDY, Texas—For much of my religious life I placed more emphasis on the physical religious messenger than on the actual message of the Bible.

During that time I used the Bible to convince myself that this behavior was the thing to do. But, although I was zealous, I was wrong.

## **Accepting their error**

Let me explain what I mean when I talk about placing more emphasis on the physical messenger than on the message.

- In the past I identified one specific church leader and one specific church organization as the direct representation of God Himself.
- Therefore I accepted the interpretations, proclamations and policies as coming straight from God.

As time passed, I discovered a major problem. Many of those interpretations, proclamations and policies simply were not true.

Someone may say: It is not your job to question whether these teachings were true, but it is your obligation to follow the physical leader.

My response: That is called emphasizing the physical messenger more than the message (the truth).

## **Myopic view**

Here is another problem with my previous perspective.

In the past I identified people outside the Church of God community as unacceptable messengers, and therefore I was not very interested in what they had to say. How myopic!

Then I came to appreciate the obvious.

- Truth is not identified by the person who is saying it. Truth is identified by what is true—no matter who is saying it.

■ There are pearls of wisdom and nuggets of nuttiness both inside and outside of the Church of God community.

Mature believers listen and discern (Hebrews 5:12-14).

Jesus Christ recognized truthful statements from other people (Mark 12:34). If Jesus acknowledged truth from the lips of other people, why don't we?

Paul quoted truthful statements from other people. By quoting writers known to his audience (Acts 17:28), Paul sought to reach people in their own world (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

### **Shoe that fits**

Let me conclude with a story a friend sent to me. Although the example is about a Catholic priest, the lesson can apply to us.

This story demonstrates the power of a preconceived notion.

A drunk man who smelled like alcohol sat down on a subway seat next to a priest. The man's tie was stained, his face was plastered with red lipstick, and a half-empty bottle of gin was sticking out of his torn coat pocket.

He opened his newspaper and began reading. After a few minutes the man turned to the priest and asked, "Say, Father, what causes arthritis?"

The priest replied: "My son, it's caused by loose living, consorting with cheap, wicked women, too much alcohol and lack of bathing."

"Well, I'll be darned," the drunk muttered, returning to his paper.

The priest, thinking about what he had said, nudged the man and apologized: "I'm very sorry. I didn't mean to come on so strong. How long have you had arthritis?"

The drunk replied: "I don't have it, Father. I was just reading here that the pope does."