

Why I Am Not In A... Cowboy Church

I. History

- A. Without getting into the romanticized image of the America West that was such a fixture of American pop culture in the early 20th century, let's just say that Cowboy churches trace their roots to about 1970.
- B. Organizations, such as Cowboys for Christ and Rodeo Cowboy Ministries, grew out of nondenominational prayer meetings held at rodeos and other events.
- C. "The world's first stationary cowboy church" began in 1985 by Jeff Copenhaver at Billy Bob's Texas.
- D. The Baptist General Convention of Texas began working with Cowboy churches in 2000 with the establishment of the Cowboy Church of Ellis County.
- E. Many other denominations, including Pentecostals, Methodists, and Nazarenes, have also helped found Cowboy churches.

II. Characteristics

- A. Many, at least in our area, seem to be very Baptist in their doctrine (if you can find anything on what they believe)
- B. Nondenominational
 - 1. Loosely affiliated congregations that remain largely independent
- C. Non-traditional
 - 1. Meet in sale barns, arenas, etc.
 - 2. May not do things such as pass offering plates
 - 3. "Come as you are"
- D. Western Heritage Culture
 - 1. EVERYTHING is rooted in the western world, from decor to music to terminology
- E. Mission to reach the "unchurched"

III. Some Issues I have with their philosophy and practices

- A. NOTE - I can't really go into doctrines like I have with other groups mainly because doctrine is not emphasized or standardized
- B. In many ways, they are a reaction to problems in today's churches
 - 1. Many see church as stuffy, rigid, and judgmental, so they strive to be the opposite.
 - 2. Reactions = Overreactions
- C. "Meeting half way"
 - 1. The idea of watering down the church and Christianity so as to make it more palatable for non-churchgoers
 - 2. This is not the idea Paul expresses in I Corinthians 9:19-23
- D. Heavy on Western culture, light on doctrine
 - 1. While many preach the true Gospel, there seems to be little focus on doctrine

2. Most the emphasis is on being a good person
3. “Cowboy Church of Ellis County practices historic, biblical Christianity. We embrace the core teachings of the Christian faith that have survived the test of time and been widely embraced by the Christian church as a whole. This includes things such as the virgin birth, the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and the necessity of faith in Christ for the remission of sins. But just as important, we believe that faith should be practical—that it should be applied. A system of doctrines and beliefs is of little value if it accomplishes nothing in the life of the person holding it. So, our primary focus will always be the Word of God applied to real life. Just as Jesus spoke in the common language of his day to penetrate hearts and change lives, we work hard to make the Bible both understandable and applicable to life today.” - <http://cowboyfaith.org/about-us/our-beliefs/>

E. Niche appeal of the gospel

1. Focuses on one group of people to reach and minister to
2. “Cowboy Church of Ellis County was founded as an outreach to cowboys and others who live or love rural and western lifestyles. In many ways, that mission has not changed. Cowboy Church continues to reach out to cowboys and their families with a state of the art covered rodeo arena, as well as numerous rodeo, equine, and outdoor activities. Among these are amateur bull riding, team roping, team sorting, barrel racing, and equine activities for kids.
However, you don't have to be a cowboy to enjoy Cowboy Church. From fishing tournaments and motorcycles to old fashioned game nights and pot-lucks, Cowboy Church has over 40 different ministries and fellowships designed to appeal to almost anyone. We also offer some of the finest youth and children's programs to be found anywhere. So, even if you're not a cowboy, check us out. You may be surprised at how well we'll fit.” - <http://cowboyfaith.org/about-us/ministries/>

IV. References

- A. <http://americanfcc.org/>
- B. <http://www.texasmonthly.com/story/where-have-all-cowboy-churches-come>
- C. <http://www.wrs.vcu.edu/profiles/CowboyChurches.htm>