

The Brown Street Beacon

*"...Shine out among them like beacon lights,
holding out to them the Word of Life" (Phil 2:15-16)*



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All Hat, No Cattle

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Living in Texas for the last seven years, I have learned a little bit about cowboy hats. Enough to know I should not be wearing one at least. Having spent my formative years in the northeast where we are more likely to say “*you-uns*” than “*y’all*,” I figure I am lucky they let me stay here without a passport to begin with.

The phrase “*All hat, no cattle*,” would apply to someone like me who tried to dress up like a Texan and act like a cowboy for the day. I would be playing a part and committing a fraud. It is laughable to the natives to see someone walking around in a ten-gallon hat who clearly can’t tell which is the business end of a longhorn. That’s me. I would be all hat and no cattle.

But we can see a similar fraud perpetrated on the church by some within her ranks. They put on their big, fancy hat by claiming to be a child of God, calling themselves a Christian, and inserting themselves among the company of disciples. Beneath that hat grinds the mind of someone who hasn’t yet learned about the business end of faith.

The extent of their faith is the occasional appearance at the meetinghouse. They may even come every Sunday and still be all hat. There are some whose presence is more surprising to us than their absence.

To call oneself a disciple of Christ and then purposely neglect the assembling of the saints is evidence of a faith that is all hat. The command is as clear at the dinner bell at the ranch house: “*And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching*” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Some will lift their brims and eye you suspiciously, then say, “*Don’t you know ‘forsaking’ means that you quit coming altogether? I still come at least once a month.*”

Cool your spurs, cowgirl. When we teach that the first drink that leads to drunkenness is as wrong as the last, we make an important point about the incremental nature of sin. It becomes easier with each foray into the shadow of deadly works. With worship, the first willful absence may be as harsh as the first snort of whiskey. But that initial experiment deadens the sensibility a little and the next shot is taken more smoothly. That’s how you got to be a once-a-monther, partner.

And you still expect to go to heaven, right? How about if we could change your heavenly reward to a once per month affair? You spend 29 days in Hell and then we'll let you cross over for a day. What? You expect more out of God? He expects more out of you, too.

The noble name, "*Christian*," is not some meaningless appellation, but a descriptive term. When you wear the name of God's son, you had better be more than all hat. To be Christ-like means having no priority more prior than accepting and giving the blessings of faith (Ephesians 1:3, Acts 20:35). To behave otherwise is hypocrisy, an accusation made by Jesus against the play-actors of his day, the Pharisees and scribes. They were all hat with their enlarged fringes and broadened phylacteries (Matthew 23:5). But when it came to justice, mercy and faith, they were no cattle (Matthew 23:23).

To call oneself a disciple of Christ means something, too. It is a claim to be a follower and student of the Master. What kind of follower is constantly found in places where the Master would never go? What kind of student sits at his Master's feet so rarely that his presence would surprise the more diligent of the number? One who is all hat.

"Oh, but I am still a child of God." Good for you. Like the prodigal son was still his father's boy (Luke 15:11-32)? Is that the kind of faith you imagine for yourself? Even the prodigal son grew discontented and returned and repented of his sins. When will you lift yourself out of the pig slop of a nauseatingly lukewarm faith (Revelation 3:16) and come home?

I have a child myself and I have to come to expect certain things out of her; maybe you expect something similar from your child. I expect her to be at the supper table when the meal is served. Could it be that you, child of God, are expected around a supper table of the Lord, which you are neglecting intentionally (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)? How many Sundays has it been now? If my daughter were mysteriously absent from our supper table, I would form a posse and hunt down whomever kidnapped her. She wouldn't disappear for no cause at all. Where were you last Sunday, child of God?

The Christian whose faith is all hat and no cattle—the hypocrite for you greenhorns who are still having trouble following this—is in grave and eternal peril. As dangerous as the longhorn is to the city slicker, the devil is more deadly, for his horns reach to the soul.