

The Oak Hills Church of Lucado

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It was a long time coming. Oak Hills “Church of Christ,” San Antonio, Texas, is no more. No, it did not close its doors (unfortunately). It will now be just “Oak Hills Church.” However, the name more accurately describing this religious body would be “Oak Hills Church of Lucado” (OHCL). The news has traveled rapidly since it appeared in a story in the *San Antonio Express-News* on September 6, 2003. In case some of our readers are unaware, this is the church that, over the previous fifteen years, had come under the total thrall of Max Lucado, renowned best-selling author of religious books. He is also a renowned (among those who are informed) theological liberal and false teacher.

My first reaction at this news was, “What took them so long?” Dropping *Church of Christ* from their name was the most natural and normal thing they could (and should) have done – long ago. It was also the only honest thing they could do regarding their identity. Given Lucado’s outrageously anti-Scriptural statements and behavior on numerous occasions spanning several years (easily documentable and widely known), this move was inevitable. They ceased being a church of Christ in any Scriptural sense years before. By hypocritically hanging on to *Church of Christ* as part of their name, they spent a long time deceiving and confusing a gullible public about what a church of Christ is.

While subtracting some words from their name, they were, however, adding some things to their worship activities – instruments of music. The report indicated that Oak Hills will begin a new Sunday evening worship hour – aimed at young adults – that would include instrumental music. This announcement should have surprised no one. On their Website (www.oakhillschurchofchrist.org) they have the following statement:

The use of instrumental accompaniment is not a doctrinal issue at Oak Hills, but it is part of our religious heritage that we have chosen to preserve. We continue to use a capella singing as our primary source of music for our worship assemblies.

The reader will note that the OHCL does not consider the use or non-use of instrumental music in worship a “doctrinal issue.” Its non-use is only a “tradition” in the “Church of Christ” (merely another denomination in their view), to be preserved or cast aside by the local powers that be. How magnanimous of them to have “chosen to preserve” this “part of our religious heritage” for this long! You can mark it down that the root of their apostasy (and of those on the same road with them) is not just introduction of the instrument. This is only the symptom. The

spiritual disease is rebellion against the authority of Jesus Christ by rejection of His Word, His doctrine, His law. The eternal fate of all who persist in this course is not a matter of guesswork: "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48).

The OHCL Website also carries the following note pertaining to fellowship:

We have chosen to emphasize what we have in common with other Christian groups rather than debate about our differences. We try to be "Christians only" and believe that no particular group is designated by God as "the only Christians." We are non-denominational.

The choice they have made concerning fellowship is not one any of us has the right to make. Put these words in the mouth of our Lord and see just how ridiculous they are: "I have chosen to emphasize what I have in common with the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, chief priests, and lawyers, rather than debate about our differences." They work no better with the Old Testament prophets or with John the baptizer, Peter, John, Stephen, or Paul. The apostles most certainly had no trouble believing and preaching that they and their "particular group" were "the only Christians." It is both false humility and false doctrine to assert that others are Christians besides those whom the inspired writers identify as such. No, OHCL and its comrades-in-arms congregations are not "non-denominational;" they are all **inter-**denominational because they have, by their own departures, transformed themselves into denominational bodies. Again, with their history of disdain for New Testament authority, I ask: "What took them so long" to finally make the break?

The *Express-News* article's lead paragraph reads:

Max Lucado hopes renaming his church, opening new campuses, and adding musical instruments to the worship service will help bring more people to Christ.

Ordinarily, I would attribute the statement indicating that Oak Hills is "his [Max Lucado's] church" to "reporter misconception and ignorance." However, in this case, the reporter hit a home run. Oak Hills is Lucado's church. He has obviously been given carte blanche to take the church wherever he chooses to go doctrinally. It has become the mirror image of all his ecumenical compromises and doctrinal betrayals of the Savior he claims to serve.

Who does Lucado think he is fooling? He and his disciples are not making these changes to "bring more people to Christ." Were this so, they would still be preaching and practicing the Truth (as the founders of the old Fredericksburg Road Congregation [Oak Hill's original name] doubtless set out to do in 1958). These changes will merely attract more gullible people who are

already separated from Christ into Lucado's denomination that is also separated from Christ. Let us state their aim accurately: to "bring more people to Lucado." The most accurate name change would simply replace Christ with Lucado, for this is what Oak Hills is – The Oak Hills Church of Lucado (OHCL).

Lucado admitted his unabashed pragmatism in the name change and the addition of instrumental music to one of their worship periods. The news story quoted him:

When it comes to strategy, when it comes to approach, we want to do whatever seems most effective at the time....

In other words, whatever it takes – the end justifies the means, in order to keep attracting people. He has thus found it "effective" through the years to do and say all sorts of things that are a stench in the nostrils of those who are dedicated members of the blood-bought church of Christ. The following examples are mere "starters":

- Spoke in a Roman Catholic church and praised the local priest as if he were a saint
- Exchanged pulpit appearances with a liberal Baptist preacher with nothing but praise for him as a "brother"
- Fully endorsed and participated as a speaker in the inter-denominational, semi-Pentecostal Promise-Keepers' spectacles
- Told people in a radio broadcast that they could be saved by reciting a version of the denominational "sinner's prayer" and could be baptized later, but not in order to be saved
- Invented his mythical boat, "Fellowship," on which every stripe of sectarian religionist was depicted as sailing toward the Heavenly port

Note that the OHCL announced plans for "opening new campuses," meaning "making Oak Hills a multisite church with campuses throughout San Antonio," as the story also reports. As with their errors relating to fellowship, the plan of salvation, and worship, now they are embarking on an utterly unauthorized organizational plan. The New Testament authorizes only individual, autonomous congregations, each with its own plurality of elders (Acts 20:28; Phi. 1:1; et al.). But such Scriptural teaching is no obstacle to Lucado. The OHCL is reaching back to Kip McKean's old Boston Church plan of the 1980s. McKean set up his satellite sub-churches all over the Boston, Massachusetts, area, answerable not to their own respective elders (for they had none), but to the "Mother Church" – then ruled by McKean who was eventually dethroned.

These announcements elicit mixed emotions. That a once-faithful congregation of God's people could stray so far as to totally lose its identity is a source of great sadness. On the other hand, there is cause for rejoicing in knowing that the implication is now gone that Oak Hills

was representative of churches of Christ, generally. I have through these pages more than once urged elders and preachers of apostate congregations to “shape up, or ship out,” just as a matter of integrity if nothing else. I will continue this plea, even as I continue to pray that they will do one or the other – repent of their errors or change their name to match their denominational status.

OHCL has done what it and many other congregations should have long ago done. Who knows but that their action will serve as an encouragement to other errant congregations to do the same thing? Discerning brethren know of several other congregations that should follow the OHCL lead, because they are not far behind them in doctrine and practice. The sooner the rest of them admittedly jump the old ship of Zion, the safer the ship will be for those who still have the Heavenly port in view.

[Note: I wrote this MS, and it originally appeared in the October 2003 issue of *The Gospel Journal*, a 36-page monthly of which I was editor at the time.]

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