



Sunday, January 31, 2020

# WEST VALLEY CHURCH OF CHRIST

## Seeing the Difference

If you see me out and about, there's a fair chance you'll see me wearing a hat that sports my favorite Australian rules football team, the Hawthorn Hawks. I'm a big fan of Aussie rules footy as I am of Australia, a place that still feels very much like home to me, and wearing a Hawks hat keeps me connected in a small way to both. I actually have a few of these hats, a couple of them that are even emblazoned with the corporate sponsors of the team back in Australia, Tasmania (i.e. the state government of Tasmania's tourist board) and iiNet (an internet service provider).

Even though these hats are made conspicuously different both by the logo itself and by the logos of these foreign corporate sponsors, people tend to see the word Hawks and transform the logo into something that they grasp, especially when it shares even a passing resemblance to something they value. My postal lady the other day saw my hat as I was talking with her and asked if I worked at Buckeye High School. I found out that the Hawks were Buckeye's mascot and that she had graduated from that school 40 years ago. More than once I've been accused of being a "good Iowa man," only to find out that it was because that person was from Iowa and had seen my hat and transformed the logo (and evidently the word "Hawks") into the Hawkeyes logo. As you can see, neither the Buckeye logo nor the Hawkeyes logo look much like the Hawthorn logo.



It's pretty common for people to attempt to take something that they don't understand and work it into the framework of something that they do. Sometimes the end result is simply a harmless misunderstanding. However, when this happens in journey with God the result can be disastrous.

God told us through the prophet Isaiah, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways" (Isaiah 55:8). When we encounter teachings from the Bible that differ from our prior understandings or that call us to change our behavior, it is easy to take what we understand or have already done / are doing and read that into the words of the Bible.



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However, we should remember that God does not and will not conform to us. We should also remember the end of following our way instead of God's: "There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

God said, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them" (Exodus 20:4-5). It's very easy to look at that text and think the only behavior we need to avoid is something we in modern America were probably never tempted to do anyway, namely, bow down and worship a statue or image. However, this verse should serve as a reminder 1) that we must not allow God and His will to be reimagined via our experiences or desires (e.g. Colossians 3:5) and 2) that we must see a fundamental difference between God and anything we experience in His creation.

What I often secretly hope in wearing my Hawks hats is for someone either to recognize the logo or to ask about it so I can start a conversation about Aussie rules. Either way, I'm expecting whoever does bother to look to see something different. I believe that God gave His Word with the same expectation in mind. God may have spoken through a book just like countless men and women have done, but God is both unlike and greater than those countless men and women. We have to approach His book expecting something different and better. So, challenge yourself as you read the Bible text to see what's there and not simply what you want to be there.