

# FCA Role and Culture

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## **FCA Role and Culture:**

In most of the moments where there was a dark cloud over FCA, the dark cloud was really one that I'd internalized and was carrying around.

I still believe that much of the content and practices of the Christianity that was practiced there was a system of control and not Biblical in nature, but many people running and attending FCA thought that everything was fine.

Perceptions of FCA tended to differ greatly. I know that I'm not the only person who saw problems. My brother also didn't like it, but unlike me, he didn't care about making it better most of the time. He wanted to leave and go to public school. He was physically abused, more so than me, not counting his behavior toward me, so he's not the best example of why being at FCA was difficult.

A few times when I was in high school, people would tell me that being at FCA sucked, I replied that school sucks no matter where you go and they tended to agree. Oddly, I think that I was trying to play a "damage control" role, despite my feelings, in that I was defensive of FCA and Faith BC, which ran FCA back then.

I connected most, at school, with people who had difficult family experiences.

The way that family played a role is that I and possibly others sought to replace family with Christians since they'd had a traumatic or emotionally distant upbringing. To such people, including myself, when a Christian church or FCA was not behaving like a family it was obvious.

People who had a supportive environment at home didn't seem to notice when FCA or a certain church was not functioning as a family. They had something to come home to. I didn't.

Elementary was when the illusion of institutionalized family held up the best. All I had to do was perform well in school and teachers would praise me. Sometimes even my parents would, as well, but it was a hit or miss thing.

I was overachieving, and I was on the edge of falling into misery, until I fell in when I was around 13.

I had spiritual beliefs, but they had little to do with my behavior. I really just wanted adult approval, the feeling of a family, friends, and girls, of course, that I liked to like me.

Teachers in K-5 were relatively in touch with our needs and were more relaxed in general.

When I was 13, I fell into misery. The previous arrangement that I'd imagined didn't seem to be working any longer.

I latched onto the rules harder because the adults at school were now my main friends. Since I didn't communicate well, they were nearly the only people who took the time to understand me.

Mike, Andy, and Dustin were the main exceptions, most of the time, among my peers. To others, even supposed friends like Jamie, I seemed like an oddity. They'd try to get reactions out of me. Often it was playful, but it tended to make me angry and later sad.

To be fair, my peers didn't know better or understand that I was different. I believe that the majority of times people did or said things to make me react, they were just being curious and maybe even friendly in their own way.

Our Middle School (then called Junior High) and High School teachers were a mixed bag, but most were rather impersonal about rules. Even ones that were kind like Dale Moe or goofy like Carl Detweiler were raised around strict religious systems and they felt that enforcing non-Biblical rules was a necessary act of duty for their job position or even somehow a way to make students better people.

Some parents even expressed that sending their adult offspring to a Christian college with more rules than another was somehow a way of having "higher standards", such as those which seek to actively monitor and control strict attire, music genres, legal alcohol consumption (even off campus), adults of opposite sexes touching, remarriage after divorce, masturbation, and even thinking about sex.

I disagree strongly with the rules above and the view that having more rules is superior to having fewer. In the New Testament and even places in the Old Testament (Tanakh) such as Isaiah 66:1-5, just following rules is a lower standard and becomes a way for evil people to look better and gain power over others. I've looked at passages of the Bible (including using original languages and historical context) to justify their restrictions listed above and what some say are there are not there. I'd add that the less mature someone is, the more structure is appropriate. But keeping someone under strict rules hinders their development, from what I've seen over and over.

To be clear, keeping people under non-Biblical rules is never appropriate, and treating adults as children is harmful. It's the primary characteristic of cults, despite strict churches and Christian

colleges redefining a cult as a group "having a different definition of Christ". Redefining the term "cult" allows these churches and colleges to dominate adults with impunity.

The more strictness a Christian school has, from what I've seen, the greater a divide there is between students who want to follow Christ and those who don't. The divide doesn't help "reach" the ones who don't. Rather, it has encouraged some of them or the others to become either more hardened against any form of spirituality or wisdom, less circumspect and supported, and therefore more susceptible to subversion by any substance or guru. People make their own decisions, but not teaching simple things like how to drink safely can put a person in harm's way, as many do not follow strict prohibitions nor come to the person for help who prohibited it.

Churches and schools in the 80s and 90s insisted that having more rules such as for dress code and music provided a "better testimony for Christ" to other schools and outsiders. It seemed totally fake to me, for example, when players had to wear ties on days there were inter-school sports events because "some other Christian schools" did it.

I know a bit about other Christian schools because I went on a Upper Bucks Christian School bus. Bethel Baptist Church of Sellersville owned and operated that school or still does, so the buses said "Bethel Baptist" I think. I had a female pen pal briefly in High School, as well, who went to High Point Baptist Academy.

It was clear that, at High Point, the atmosphere was more positive. They seemed less strict and more compassionate. At UBCS, the atmosphere was more negative and divided.

At Bethel BC and its school UBCS, the abundance of rules, enforcement, and virtue signaling caused a harsh reality. Students had to choose between being mocked daily for being Christians, or join the very rowdy and crude majority.

I had a friend named Justin Mitchel who was one of the rowdy kids. He was in the class of 1999. I heard a rumor he died young, but I can't be sure. I think one of his biological parents was a drug addict.

Justin was a steam valve for me because I could say anything and it wouldn't matter or he'd think it was funny, no matter how crude it was. I'd very much like to know if he is O.K. and to be able to talk to him if so.

FCA was somewhere in between High Point Baptist Academy and UBCS in terms of division, strictness, and grace. Grace allows people to know they are loved even if they break rules or are eventually punished. If grace is hard to see, then the whole meaning of the rules goes away. If there are too many rules, grace dries up too quickly for it to be even noticeable in many cases.

One of the major problems with legalistic rules is that they are treated the same way as Biblical truths in terms of discipline. You sassed a teacher? That's 3 demerits. You forgot to wear a belt? That's 2. The numbers are approximate, but you get the idea. They are part of the same scale. They weren't treated differently, at least back then at such schools. There was also little positive reinforcement for doing well, especially in an individualistic way, since the emphases on top-tier

achievement and avoiding infractions were so pervasive.

Eventually the Biblical truths seemed meaningless to many people because the only ones that were emphasized were ones that seemed to align with the meaningless and carnal systems of control. Somehow, many leaders believed, the more carnal rules you have, the more spiritual you become. This is a message that opposes the Bible.

The demerit system kept a list of wrongs that was entirely impersonal. For example: sassing a teacher plus forgetting a belt plus not having a shirt tucked in equals a detention, or something like that. Probably more infractions were necessary to get enough demerits for a detention, but the issue is that these acts and omissions had equivalent results.

At least one student made it his aim to always get just enough demerits to not quite get a detention. I think another student said something similar about doing just enough to avoid getting punished. I think the demerits reset to 0 each semester.

The new system, which came about years after I left, was more personal. There were fewer dress code rules, and teachers could use their own judgment about when to deal with such rules and when to give detentions after students were warned about wrongdoing or did something blatant.

Teachers are also no longer required to attend Faith BC, which drastically changed the environment. Even Faith BC eventually changed somewhat drastically, eliminating the position of "head pastor" after Paul Auckland was replaced, and making several other moves to somewhat flatten the authority structure.

To be fair, even before that, the Church began to allow Christian Rock and other things. Paul Auckland once said in an FCA Teacher meeting around 2011, shortly after the school broke off from Faith BC, "Life is change, and that which hasn't changed has died."

Paul Auckland was very eloquent and usually indisputably Bible-based in doctrine. However, unfortunately, anyone who I talked to about problems with FCA or Faith BC growing up would cite his correct doctrine as the reason why everything was ok and practices should not be challenged.

In addition, I don't necessarily agree with all of his doctrine. When I went to college at Cairn University (then changing names from PCB to PBU) my mind was blown by the fact that many other denominations and non-denominational churches held most or all of what Baptists called "Baptist Distinctives".

Once a friend told me her aunt, who was rather young at the time (in the 80s approximately) sought counseling from Bethel BC's pastor Harris. He put his hand on her leg and said, "Have you ever had sex." She felt uncomfortable and discontinued counseling. As far as I know, it was never reported.

I highly doubt such behavior would be an isolated incident, but Harris continued to be a fiery legalistic Baptist preacher and led the church throughout the 90s and perhaps beyond.

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