



Bible Study Kevin Moore and his wife, Myra, talk scripture at Saturday morning convocation

NAKED BEFORE GOD: CHRISTIAN NATURISTS HAVE NOTHING TO HIDE

Many consider nudist resorts the anti-church and, of course, orgy central: hotbeds of lust where loose women, exhibitionists, hedonists, perverts, child predators and the like assemble to roll around in a big stinky pile of sin and vulgarity. And they can't see how good Christians could fit in—or why they'd even want to try.

On this weekend, more than 20 members of the Christian Nudist Convocation (CNC) gather at Cherokee Lodge nudist park near Crossville, Tennessee. The CNC crowd has gathered to take notes, talk scripture, and to prep fortified biblical explanations for naysayers who think that God would never sanction social nudity. They do, in fact, believe God led them here—to their own Garden of Eden.

For the most part, the morning's conversation is typical church talk: they were created in God's image, and what he made was very good. Jesus died for their sins, and so on.

Then they get into this summer's Christian nudist theme, the stuff that they've been reading in the stream-of-consciousness posts that CNC organizer Boyd Allen has plastered on his website. "But of course we cannot possibly continue in this life perfectly without sin," one post reads. "Then what do we do? We grab the nearest bush and hide from God, right? No, no, no.... That was what Adam and Eve did, remember? We don't want to do that again!"

Allen continues, "We run to God as we are and ask him to forgive us and not just cover our sins but to wash them away and we will be clean spiritually. Jesus [the] Christ washed away our sins.... We have been restored to our original state to where we can come to God in the garden, walk and talk with him 'just as I am.' Then why do we still insist that our bodies are shameful?"

But wasn't it God who clothed Adam and Eve? If the eye rolling and the groans are any indication, the CNC's Saturday morning congregation has heard plenty of that before.

As Allen puts it, all God says to a fig-leaf-laden Adam and Eve in Genesis is: who told you that you were naked, and

have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat? "Whoa here," Allen writes. "That sounds more like he was displeased with their discovery. Now we all know that God did indeed clothe them, but was that to cover their naked bodies in shame, or was it to protect them in their new environment?"

The CNCers adhere to the latter. Nudity is righteous, but at certain temperatures, cavorting without your pants on becomes a little silly. Today, as the session drones on in the sticky heat, even Kevin leads worship totally nude, baring an upper body shaved to appear near prepubescent.

It's apparent that if the CNCers lack anything, it's body shame. They adjust themselves in plastic patio chairs that leave horizontal marks between their shoulder blades. Some are squished so tightly into the dirty seats that their flesh presses into the armrests and spills over the sides.

Kevin's gone through the Bible and marked every reference to nakedness, give or take a few. He talks about how God spoke to Isaiah and told him to walk barefoot and unclothed. How Peter fished naked near the shores of Galilee. And how Jesus was nude when he washed the feet of his disciples. "But there's nothing in there that says nudity is inherently wrong," he says. For much of the weekend, their dialogue centers on such nude biblical references.

If anything, the group would be hard-pressed to understand why an outsider might find it offensive. With his freckled face and eyebrows so blond they're near invisible, Boyd Allen looks a little like an overgrown Opie. It's fitting for a country boy who grew up on a 40-acre farm in Florida.

When Boyd was 13, he gave into a simple, compelling urge that burned inside him: he needed to be naked. He would undress and sneak off into the woods to run and explore. It wasn't what a good Christian boy living in a strict household was supposed to do. So he didn't tell anyone.

Nearly a quarter of a century later, he picked up a book about family naturism in a bookstore. "It was what I was thinking, what I was feeling, and I thought, 'This is beautiful,'" he says. He marched over to the magazine section and flipped through an issue of *Nude & Natural*. He came back a month later for the new issue, where he found some biblical talk about nudism. "I bought the magazine and started looking up the scriptures. I started writing my thoughts down because it was beginning to flood my head. I just kept writing on and on."

It's that zeal that helped him become the CNC's new leader. He was elected to take the helm when the convocation last convened a couple of years ago at White Tail Resort in Virginia. CNC creator and nudist humor author Allen Parker started the CNC in 2003 to unite a handful of Christian nudist resort chapels with the hope that they'd confederate and start churches in nudist resorts across the country. Instead, he says the CNC morphed into what it is today—more of a social outing, a place for meeting, greeting and fellowship time.



Above: Guitars for God Lonnie Kimble, a CNC newbie, provided all of the music for the weekend's worship. Right: Boyd Allen prepares his sermon.

Today, Allen's 4-year-old daughter darts from tent to tent at the CNC campsite, just as happy as she can be. Allen's wife, Gwin, grills hamburgers and hot dogs for the group cookout.

This is the family life of Boyd's dreams—a wife who disrobed before he did at their first visit to a nudist resort outside of Greensboro, N.C., and a daughter who can run free and nude, without the shame and secrecy that marred his childhood jaunts.

But the family's nudist life hasn't been all that easy. Boyd doesn't talk much about their struggle to stay nude and happy. But Gwin does.

She sits at the picnic table, her cookout duties complete, and talks about how Boyd would move the family to Cherokee tomorrow if he could. It would certainly make nudity easier, but Gwin isn't prepared to isolate her family from friends and relatives who'd never step foot in such a place.

It's not that they live in secret. Most of their neighbors know.

It's difficult to convince people that subjecting a child to so much nudity doesn't make you a pervert. Just ask Cameron Bennett. This is his first CNC, and he's brought his wife and two kids along for the ride. After all the hell they've been through with their home church, they're considering joining the Little Church in the Wildwood.

They attended the Church of Antioch until Cameron got candid about their lifestyle. He told his Bible study group that he attended worship service at a nudist park, and things quickly began to change. He tried to volunteer in the church's nursery but was turned away. "I was urged during the business meetings, 'Don't volunteer anymore. The ladies are nervous—they don't want you in there,'" he says. "They were afraid that I was going to molest a child.

He withdrew his membership from the church and asked God to lead the way. He found the CNC. "Maybe this is where I return to the Lord..." he says.

Soul Man Boyd Allen, the group's fearless leader, takes to the pulpit at the Little Church in the Wildwood. Cameron and others believe children are natural nudists. They think that kids, much like Adam and Eve, should be free to run nude through the garden, to live their lives without knowing

shame—that it would take Satan, or a prudish parent, to plant the idea of shame into their hearts and minds.

A pack of CNC kids run around the resort, fighting over Thomas the Tank Engine and playing with flashlights. Except for the occasional pair of pull-up training pants, they're nude. They scribble with pink sidewalk chalk that smears across their rears and bellies. No one cares if the kids get dirty. They'll get hosed off later.

And they appear to be very, very happy. They don't seem to notice anyone's nakedness—especially their own.

CNC parents think these kids will be better-adjusted adults for it. They subscribe to the mantra that nudism demystifies the body, satiates curiosity about the opposite sex, curbs premarital sex and combats poor body image in children.

Many of the CNC women wish they'd had such a childhood. They huddle together in a corner of the pavilion for a women's-only session and gab about everything from their own bouts with bad body image to uncomfortable bras and The Tyra Banks Show.

Most were lured into the nudist lifestyle by their husbands. Myra Moore, who is married to Kevin, says her husband's desire to explore the nudist community floored her.

It took six months to get Myra to a resort, but Kevin didn't push. He knew it was delicate. Myra was molested at age 6, and had lingering issues with her body. "He was caring enough and he was Christian enough to think about me and what I'd been through," she says. "He waited until I was ready, and he showed me how to trust him, trust in God and go to a resort."

Another woman chimes in. She was molested from age 3 to 11 and dreaded being nude around her husband. When she agreed to dabble in social nudity on her delayed honeymoon, she was terrified. "When I got there, I saw that the people weren't looking at me as a piece of meat; they treated me just like if I was wearing clothes—in fact, better than that. They just accepted you for you. It's really actually helped me in many, many ways.... I can be around my house nude, around my husband nude and it doesn't bother me. It's done a lot of healing."

All of the CNC women nod. The nudity-as-a-healer theme is a common one.

The CNC women agree that the nudist resort is one of the few places where they aren't judged by the size of their breasts or the style of their clothes.

They consider themselves to be a modest bunch. It's the other women, the clothed ones with cascading cleavage and push-up bras—the ones with the lustful "look at me" intentions—who are immodest, they say.

They know that many a Christian would find the nudist idea of modesty laughable. And all of those claims about nudity for the sake of body acceptance? They know some would say they're twisting the scripture to justify their desire to let their goodies out for all to see.

But at Cherokee, no one seems to be looking. The CNCers give good eye contact because it's considered poor form to look down.

When Kevin asks the congregation where lustful thoughts come from, several of the women say Satan. “The Book of James says it comes from within our own heart. You’re making it someone else’s problem if you’re saying you can’t be naked because it’s going to generate lustful thoughts in me. You’re putting your own weaknesses on them.”

They believe that not all nudity is created equal. It’s a notion that’s difficult for most in our sex-soaked society to comprehend, they say. If the only time we’re exposed to nudity is in a sexual context, then we’ll think that bare bodies at a nudist resort must be sexual.

The CNCers don’t see clothes as lust deterrents. Even Gwin confessed to the women’s group that she has “always found that clothing, if it drapes on a man just right, is more provocative than 100 naked men.” See, they think of their lifestyle as “chaste nakedness.” They’ve got Jesus in their hearts.

When Lonnie Kimble, a CNC newbie, straps on his acoustic guitar (and nothing else), it’s an image ripe for the cover of a romance novel. He plays “Jesus Loves Me” at the morning sermon, probably without an ounce of lust in his heart. He’s got the toned, beach body of a surfer, with tousled, sun-bleached waves that tease his broad shoulders. He looks like Jesus with a tan and access to modern grooming.

The place is virtually sexless. And the folks at Cherokee Lodge want it that way. The rule sheets disbursed at check-in offer these warnings: no dirty dancing, lap dancing, lingerie or overt sexual behavior. There’s even a surveillance camera in the hot tub.

This is no swingers club either. If it were, Rick, CNC’s resident disco-dancing bachelor, wouldn’t have it. He does admit that, during a prior Cherokee visit, one woman started talking dirty in the hot tub. He reported her to management and she was banned from the resort. “There are singles clubs. But if you want something like that, go to Nashville or Knoxville, OK?” he says. “But it’s not here at Cherokee... That’s not what nudists are here for.”

Even without the hot sex (and with all that self-policing), the Jacuzzi is still nudist Mecca. To an outsider, the thought of steeping in a tub where swimsuits are strictly disallowed with a whole slew of sweaty strangers is unappetizing. But to the CNCers, it’s just another tool in their master plan to proselytize the nudies.

“To most Christians, this resort would be the end of the world... To me, it’s Jerusalem. It’s our own backyard,” Kevin says. He calls nudists modern-day lepers who “most Christians don’t want to touch with a 10-foot pole.”

Enter the hot tub. The Bible describes God’s voice as quiet, Kevin tells the congregation. When nudists aren’t at the resort, they’re at home with the kids, the TV and all that noise. “You can’t hear God as easily. Here, you can hear a little more.” And in the Jacuzzi, they’re relaxed and easier to approach.

When Kevin burns through his long list of biblical references to nudity, some of the CNCers take notes. Sure, they’re here to get closer to God. But, at the heart of it, they know they have lots of explaining to do. “We have a calling

to teach the average Christian that naked does not equal bad,” he says. But they all know that’s a tough row to hoe. For now, they’d rather gather an arsenal of explanations they can use to tell nudists why God sanctions social nudity.

That night, God put that atheist in the hot tub, and the crew channeled Kevin—and all that scripture—and gave it their best. There’s no telling if it worked. Come Sunday morning, the CNCers can’t even remember the man’s name.

The nude bodies filter into the chapel. They arrange their towels on the pews and settle in for service.

Kimble has just slipped his guitar strap off his shoulder after leading the fellowship in singing “Amazing Grace” and “Awesome God.” The baritone voices rocked the rough pews into vibration, and everyone’s in the mood for some more soul shaking.

Pete starts his sermon so hard and loud, it’s frightening. Soon he’s howling, “You don’t have to be afraid of God anymore!” And you’re afraid. He rants in dramatized near-delirium about “Jeee-zus!” and his “guh-lory.” Before long, you’re begging him to breathe, and he does sporadically, with the deep grasping breaths of a swimmer emerging from the water.

It rings true for Pete. When God drew him to the nudist ministry, the former heathen head banger was ready. “I really feel that God laid this on my heart, that this is a ministry that he wanted me to do,” he says. “You know, of all the missionary-type endeavors to do—some people get sent to Africa, some people get sent to South America—and the Lord was like, ‘I want you to go to nudist resorts.’ And I’m like, ‘Wow, what an assignment.’ Aren’t I the lucky one, you know?”

“God especially wanted me to tell you this morning to remember that you were created in his image,” Pete tells the churchgoers as he gets into the same we’re-not-ashamed-of-what-God-created spiel the group has been pushing all weekend.

They end the service in prayer, asking God to claim the nameless, hot tub atheist for the kingdom. To extend Cherokee’s borders and to increase the Little Church’s anointed. And then they pray for their nude brothers and sisters who will be continuing the Lord’s work the next weekend as the convocation moves on to Show Me Acres nudist resort, a little slice of heaven about two hours outside of Kansas City, Mo.

Some CNCers begin to dress outside of the open doors to their modest cars—one marked with the license plate “NKD B4GD”—as a few fat, stray raindrops find their way to the group’s naked skin. Many of the men dress in the same pair of clothes they arrived in. In fact, it’s all that most of the men packed. That and a towel.

The women climb into the passenger seats, reluctantly clothed but without a bra if they can help it. And they’ll ride that way, all the way home—where they’ll quickly disrobe and once again feel free.

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