

Cultural Relevancy or Eternal Truth – It's Your Choice

Either / Or?

OK, I'm not saying that it is always an either/or situation. Cultural relevancy and eternal truth are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Yet there will come times when we as members of the body of Christ, will be placed in a position where we have to choose one or the other.

It is one of the sad realities of western society that those that do not make themselves culturally relevant are looked down upon, or even disdained. They are relegated to a class of people that are to be discounted, disenfranchised, and ignored.

Sure I Admit It

I remember when I was in my late teens and early twenties this is how I looked at people that were over thirty. These people had no significance to me. It's not that I did not care about them, I wasn't callous. Yet, they have had their opportunity and had failed. They had failed to bring peace, they had failed to bring justice; they had simply just failed. I was of the new generation, the one that would solve all the world's problems. It has been that way since generations began.

It was the same with the organized church. That was just religion and a bastion of hypocrites. At least I supposed it so. The church of my American fathers had no answers, therefore it too had failed. It was no longer cool to be Christian.

What was cool was Transcendental Meditation, Eastern religions, Cabalism, Scientology, or anything seemingly deep, mystical, and different. Christianity and the Western Church were no longer of any significance.

This was in the sixties, and this mindset has not disappeared, it has progressed. It now is taken for truth and our society, for the most part has forgotten how to think critically. We, for some reason can't see that wherever true Christianity has traveled, it has brought with it freedom and life, and that to every class of people. Yet, conversely, with many of the other of the world's religions and beliefs, they have brought to a society that adheres to them, repression, lack of progression, and many times even poverty or death.

The Paradox of Relativism

Ironically, we in America live in a society, where the freedoms that we enjoy, those having been fostered by biblical principles, are used to devalue Christian beliefs and Christians themselves. Any other belief is of value, any other belief should not be denigrated. Yet, we are free to degrade and disparage those that

are Christians and the Christian faith because that belief is no longer culturally relevant. The Christian faith no longer has any value.

How Has the Church Responded to This Situation?

The Church has approached this problem in different ways. Some in the holiness movements, and those that view Christianity as an ascetic faith, might shun anything in modern society as if it is evil. It seems they attempt to show this by doing everything they can not to dress in style or be culturally pertinent. That's not anything new. Asceticism has been seen down through the centuries, from the Essenes, to the monastic movements, and of course in some of the current expressions of our faith.

Others in the Church has taken the position that they will do anything to relate to those in their generation, supporting this stance by quoting the "Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20)"

Yet most of us know that if the Church is too much like the world, it becomes impotent in its sharing of the Gospel.

Others have done all they could to take the offence out of their portrayal of our faith. However Apostles Paul and Peter spoke of the Lord Himself as being an offense, a stumbling stone, to those of the Jewish faith (Rom 9:33; 1 Peter 2:8). Simply put, a watered down gospel is simply not the Gospel at all.

What Are We To Do?

It seems to me that the answers lays in our understanding of the Christian faith's core biblical principles, some of which would be, sanctification, holiness, love, compassion, justice, mercy, and above all eternal truth, and this list is not exhaustive. Of course if our understanding of these core principles is not in line with their correct biblical expressions, then it is us that need adjustment, not Scripture itself.

It is important to understand that these ethics do not stand alone but are part of the very nature of God Himself, and therefore eternal. Moreover, then, if our adherence to anything that is culturally relevant, causes us to violate any eternal truth for the sake of relational relevancy we are not being faithful to our what we profess to believe. And not only that...

Our faith itself will seem shallow and non-efficacious to those that we are attempting to reach.

This, without saying, is self-defeating and useless with respect to our goal of doing the Great Commission effectively.

As a result, it is not wrong on its face to be culturally relevant. Even the Apostle Paul said that he had become, "all things to all people, that by all means I might save some (1 Cor. 9:19-23)". Yet, it is hard for me to see Paul displaying tats and piercings in order to be culturally relevant to those with which he was sharing the Gospel. Don't get me wrong, if you came to Christ with tats and piercings, praise God,

you are never to be judged by other in the body of Christ. I came to Christ out of a life of drugs, long hair and rock music. That's not the point. However, if we now do those things so that people we are trying to reach can relate to us, we may lose our effectiveness and not accomplish God's purpose.

For centuries, missionaries such as Hudson Taylor would become part of the culture to which God in His providence had sent them. Taylor dressed as the Chinese of his time dressed, and grew his queue (the braided ponytail), that he might be seen as part of them. Yet the caution is this, there is a line that can be crossed. As with our culture, there are actions that are neutral, actions that do not violate any biblical principles, and therefore, we are free to do those things if it enhances our ability for others to relate to us. Nonetheless, if what we do in an attempt to relate, either violates a principle established by God, or diminishes our usefulness for the Gospel, we need to avoid these actions at all costs.

Our prime objective must always be to honor and glorify God, before Him and when among His creation.

Soli Deo Gloria

Bishop G