

4 Reasons We Need to Stop the ‘Relevance Versus Obedience’ Debate

I have to admit that I’m growing weary of the “Is it better to be relevant or obedient” arguments. Frankly, it’s wasting a lot of time and energy, plus, it’s causing division and isn’t helping the cause. Here’s why:

1. We’re not even using the word correctly. By definition, “relevance” isn’t about popularity, being cool, being liked or, by extension, compromise. Relevance is about the right thing at the right time. It’s about being connected to the matter at hand. It’s about the right tool, strategy, message or idea that fills a need. What could be more important in sharing the gospel? By misinterpreting and condemning the word “relevance” we’re closing the door on important and critical ways it could be used to reach this culture with the gospel.

2. Relevance and obedience actually work together. Using the word correctly, if you’re obedient, then you’re relevant. In our obedience, God uses us to be the right answer at the right time. Anything else is disobedience and irrelevance.

3. The relevance versus obedience argument is a slippery slope. It can too easily imply our superiority and godliness, and minimize other’s efforts to share the gospel. Are we forgetting that we’re all in this together? We all make mistakes, go too far, don’t go far enough and miss the mark in many ways. Can we just extend a little grace? You say you’re called to “preach the Holy Ghost with fire.” Great. Knock yourself out. I’m all for it. Just remember that not everyone has the same calling as you—and it’s not our job to decide which is the most important.

4. We use Scriptures like 1 Corinthians 1: 18-25 as permission

to drive away the very people we're trying to reach. That Scripture doesn't give us the right to be pushy, arrogant, weird or jerks in order to share the gospel. Our weirdness shouldn't be a badge of honor. "Speaking the truth" doesn't mean you have to be rude or insensitive when you do it. If the message of the gospel drives people away, so be it. If our behavior, style or attitude drives people away, it's wrong.

Do people compromise in sharing the gospel? *Of course.* Do others become "theology cops" in their efforts to bring them back in line? *You bet.* Maybe we should spend more time in the middle. And for what it's worth, I'm not diminishing doctrine and theology. Let's just use the right definitions when we teach (or rant via social media.) The stakes are too high in today's world to waste time just getting the choir amped up.

I'm probably dreaming to think our time would better be spent sharing the gospel with a lost culture than arguing over the wrong definition of a word. Maybe we all should just repent and start over.

But wait—you're using a fog machine at your church, and that's not godly—so I'll need to correct you on Facebook ...