

8 Ways We Can Represent God in This World

The greatest privilege believers have this side of heaven is our calling to represent God to this world.

The following are some of the criteria the Bible lays out regarding this:

1. We are called to speak the oracles of God.

The apostle Paul said that he was called to manifest the Word of God through preaching that was entrusted to him (Titus 1:3). What an amazing calling. God's will and Word came through a broken vessel of clay like Paul.

But that is not all. Every believer is called to speak the very words of God according to 1 Peter 4:11. As broken as we are, God expects us to know His written Word and how to apply it to the world in a way that is effective. Hence, we are called to diligently study His Word so we can handle and impart it without deviation (2 Tim. 2:15).

This also involves being sensitive to His Spirit and speaking prophetically as the occasion arises. All anointed preaching, sharing and conversation is in a real sense prophetic and is necessary to represent God in this world.

2. Our teaching should be based on sound doctrine.

Many people shy away from doctrine because of all the denominations and divergent interpretations of the scriptures. However, this does not mean that doctrine is unimportant and not our responsibility. All true Bible-believing Christians who study the plain sense of the Word (without the traditions of men and culture that have seeped into the church) will generally agree on all the main essentials regarding the first

principles (*kerygma*) of the gospel and its application. The apostles had a deposit of sound doctrine that they handed down to their protégés (1 Tim. 4:6 calls it “sound doctrine”) with the expectation that they would teach it to others (1 Tim. 4:13).

Biblical doctrine is necessary to train believers for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The apostle Paul was not just known for church planting but by his doctrine (2 Tim. 3:10). The apostle John says (2 John 9) that if someone does not continue in the doctrine of Christ (*didache*: the teaching handed down by Jesus and the apostles) then they do not have God. John said that if a traveling preacher doesn’t teach this doctrine then we should not put him up in our homes (2 John 10). Thus, the original apostles put much importance upon sound doctrine, which means contemporary believers are called to dig deep and move past the elementary principles of the faith into the meat of the Word (Heb. 5:12-6:3) so we can carry the deposit of sound biblical doctrine.

3. We are called to integrate godly motivation with godly activity.

Jesus corrected the religious leaders who honored God with their lips but their hearts were far from Him (Mark 7:6).

Jesus told them to wash the inside of the cup (their hearts) and not just the outside (Matt. 23:25-26). Paul spoke about how some even preach the gospel out of envy and competition and strife (Phil. 1:15) and not sincerely. God judges our hearts not just our actions (Matt. 7:21-22). Thus, our hearts, actions and words all need to be integrated with godly purity and a motive of love for our heavenly Father, which implores us to spread His kingdom.

4. We are called to live to serve, not vice versa.

Jesus said (Matt. 20:28) that He came not to be ministered to

but to minister and to give His life as a ransom for many. Often, those who are in church ministry strive for a title, position and accolades resulting in an entitlement mentality that demands everyone serve them.

For example, when I was consecrated a bishop (in 2006) many congratulated me for being “elevated” to which I replied that I believed I was being made lower, not higher. Unfortunately, the celebrity-driven secular culture in which certain popular ministers are treated as gods and rock stars has influenced the church at large. Jesus told us plainly that in the world the rulers dominate over their people (Mark 10:42), but the greatest in His kingdom are those who serve. Those who work behind the scenes to make others successful are greater in God’s eyes than those who work for public applause. If we are going to represent God in this world, we have to begin by having a servant’s heart.

5. We are called to be Christ-like in attitude.

In order to represent God we need to be Christ-like. This comes forth strongest when we do not merely think about the things we desire but what others need. The apostle Paul spoke about this in Philippians 2:3-12 when He wrote that Jesus did not think equality with God was a thing to be grasped (even though He was in substance God the Son) but made Himself of no reputation and humbled Himself and became obedient even to the death of the cross. Jesus was broken regarding His willingness to preserve His life (Matt. 26:39).

Often people are flocking to hear the most gifted speakers, singers, musicians and healers because we are a culture that celebrates gifts, talents and abilities rather than humility and brokenness. God told us (Is. 57:15) that even though He dwells in the high and lofty places, He dwells with those who are humble and contrite. He exalts the humble and resists the proud. God loves humility. The apostle Paul said not to think of ourselves higher than we ought to think (Rom. 12:3) and to

be willing to dwell with the lowly (Rom. 12:16). To represent God we need to walk in the humility and brokenness of Christ.

6. We are called to discern the times in which we live.

Jesus criticized the religious leaders of His day for not being able to discern what God was doing among them (Matt. 16:1-4). There are always transitions and changes taking place in culture that produce megatrends. God is sovereignly involved in either allowing or orchestrating this confluence of humanity and has sent us into the world in this day and age to function as lights in this world (Phil. 2:15; Acts 17:26-28). We are called to be like the sons of Issachar who understood the times they lived in and how God wanted Israel to respond (1 Chron. 12:32).

To represent God to this world, believers are not to immerse themselves serving their communities robotically, but they are to study their surrounding culture in order to apply the truth correctly to live out their purpose.

7. We are called to be in this world but not of this world.

In order to represent God, we need to put up boundaries so that while we are serving in this world we do not become part of it. Believers are called to be like ships that are in the midst of the sea without taking water into its structure—to be in the water without sinking and drowning in it. Many believers make a huge mistake when they attempt to be relevant to the world by acting like the world because it dissipates the distinguishing boundary of separation God called us to have from the values of the world (2 Cor. 6:17; 1 John 2:15-17). When believers live in conformity to the world, they are not representing God (Rom. 12:1-2).

8. We are called to walk in the fruit of the Spirit.

It is not enough to walk in the power of God; we need to walk

in the holiness, meekness, joy and peace of God. Case in point: There have been many great evangelists and pastors who moved powerfully in the supernatural but undermined the gospel by their lack of integrity and godly fruit. The apostle Paul clearly told us that the flesh is contrary to the Spirit and vice versa (Gal. 5:16-17) and that there is a huge contrast between a person living and striving for accomplishment according to the flesh and those living by the Spirit.

To represent God we need to be continually filled with His Spirit and exhibit His fruits that include love, joy, peace, patience, thankfulness, kindness, goodness, modesty and faithfulness (Gal. 5:22-23). Nothing is as contagious in this world as true joy. That is perhaps the greatest witness we have of the reality of the gospel. Unless and until the church embraces and celebrates the fruit of the Spirit over exhibitions of power, self-indulgence and flesh, we will not represent God adequately in this world.

Joseph Mattera *is overseeing bishop of Resurrection Church, Christ Covenant Coalition, in Brooklyn, N.Y. Visit him at .*