

# Has the 'Relevant' Gospel Compromised Kingdom Culture?

"I believe it's a great mistake to present Christianity as something charming and popular with no offense to it."  
—Dorothy Sayers, author

In our local church, Bible teacher Ray McCollum is leading us in an exposition of the greatest teaching ever given by the greatest teacher who ever lived. Here Jesus, in His masterpiece Sermon on the Mount, succinctly lays out in an orderly fashion exactly what is the normal Christian life.

## Who Are Real Believers?

They are "poor in spirit ... mourn ... meek ... hunger and thirst for righteousness ... merciful... pure in heart ... peacemakers" (Matt. 5:1-9).

## What Will Happen to Them?

They will be "persecuted for righteousness sake" (v. 10).

## How Do They Affect the World?

They will be the "salt of the earth" and "light of the world" (vv. 13-15).

Question: For the past few decades in America, have we practiced our faith the way Jesus outlined, or have we substituted a church-growth emphasis, which is a more comfortable, convenient, consumer-oriented and "seeker friendly" one? The content of our message determines the quality of our converts and subsequently the condition of our churches.

Lest anyone misinterpret, I am radically committed to being intentional and missional in seeking out and reaching unsaved

people. Jesus “came to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10b).

I arrange my life to connect with unbelievers daily and usually share the gospel verbally or via my testimony tract with 20 to 25 people each week. I love equipping people in lifestyle evangelism, which is natural, relational and enjoyable. For 44 years, I’ve planted churches and mentored folks to be winsome and engaging, never obnoxious or manipulative in outreach.

I agree that apart from open-air mass evangelism, we should not prematurely confront or unnecessarily alienate the unsaved and unchurched. But in our attempt to reach people, are we at times guilty of sugarcoating the message and shirking our responsibility to accurately declare and demonstrate authentic New Testament Christianity?

Here’s the deal: Millions don’t have respect for what we say because they’re not attracted to who we are. So at this critical time in church history, soon commemorating the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther launching the Reformation, isn’t it time for a second reformation wherein we come to terms with authentic New Testament Christianity reclamation as our top priority?

### **Our Modern Approach**

“If you come to our church, we promise you’ll enjoy it—it’s similar to a weekly motivational pep talk! There’s lots of convenient parking, and you’ll find it’s actually very entertaining. You’ll love our music, and you can come casual. We have free coffee and doughnuts in the lobby. You’ll be blown away by our beautiful sanctuary with comfortable seating, multidimensional lighting, plus our pastor is really cool and emphasizes the love of God. And don’t worry, he never speaks on anything political or controversial. Currently, he’s teaching a series on ‘12 Ways to Help You Succeed and Invest

Wisely.' Everything is air-conditioned, you'll get a free gift at the door and we'll have you out in about 75 minutes, unless you join us for the complimentary lunch we offer. Your kids will love the chicken nuggets! This week, we're having barbecue, plus a former WWE wrestler will share while we eat. We're even having a special drawing for two tickets to the big opening game next week! Can you come? C'mon, it'll be a lotta' fun! Please!"

Now don't hear what I'm not saying. In sensitivity to newcomers at a church, it behooves us to honor them as special guests. The challenge is to navigate the waters without losing our distinctiveness as a supernaturally led community of believers. We are not supposed to be a country club.

In the kind of service described above, and in weeks to come, will our lost friend actually hear a clear and balanced exposition of Scripture on a variety of doctrinal themes, an authentic gospel presentation and essential preaching on "happy holiness," a healthy fear of God, repentance, judgment, sin, the "cost" of discipleship and the centrality of wholehearted obedience to all Scripture as the authoritative Word of God?

Superficial services and sermonettes produce "Christianettes" (if there's even such a thing). Deviating from the method of our Master has brought disturbing developments to the contemporary church where currently 200 churches close weekly.

Let's be brutally honest, Christianity in America is bloated with compromise. We may see ourselves as successful numerically but we really are unsuccessful influentially!

Isn't it time that we start trusting that God in His sovereignty can move supernaturally on people's hearts if we'll resist the fear of people fleeing when they witness the unfamiliar and instead experience the transforming presence of God? And leaders can help immeasurably by taking cues from the

apostle Paul's guidance in 1 Corinthians 11-14 regarding how to serve the "uninitiated."

### **Consider My Experiences**

After playing in a popular rock band in Cleveland, Ohio called "The Lost Souls," I was a 20-year-old college student whose car broke down on the freeway one dreary, rainy morning. An unassuming, middle-aged black man gave me a lift, took an interest in my life and gently extended an invitation to come to his church service.

Because of his kindness, I responded affirmatively. At the time, I had completed 12 years of Roman Catholic education, was not yet born-again and had never spent one minute inside of a Protestant church. I had never experienced anything more than the unemotional, incense-filled, library-type atmosphere of a Mass with soft, somber organ music in our parish church.

When I went that Sunday, God was providentially leading. My experience was anything but seeker sensitive.

I walked inside a dilapidated, inner city, storefront church where I was the only white guy present; the benches looked like holdovers from World War II; the singing was exuberant as congregants swayed and clapped hands in a celebratory way that caused my inner circuits to explode in amazement; and the pastor who preached passionately, something I'd never heard at Holy Cross, happened to be the very gentleman who gave me that early-morning ride. A smiling lady next to me even poked me in the ribs during worship, encouraging me with, "Clap your hands, honey!"

Weeks later, in the privacy of my bedroom, I yielded my life unreservedly to Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. The church experience that led up to my conversion was admittedly strange to me, but didn't hinder me, because God's unmistakable presence was there, and it changed my life.

Years later, I wrote a book on my story, *Clap Your Hands!* which must've resonated with lots of people. since over a quarter-million folks around the world got themselves a copy, and many passed it on to a family member or friends. It's still out there on Kindle and folks contact me periodically telling how God used it in their lives.

## **The Jesus Movement**

A couple years later when I was selected for a position at the AFL-CIO headquarters in Washington, D.C., God providentially led me to a small nucleus of "Jesus people" gathering together in a woman's living room. With the Bible as our only guide and the simplicity of sold-out commitment to Jesus, we multiplied in a few years from a handful to over 2000 meeting just 15 minutes from the White House!

In a season when charismatic expression was not widely accepted or well-known, we worshipped exuberantly; enjoyed the gifts of the Spirit like prophetic exhortations; held nothing back about the baptism of the Spirit, tongues-speaking and divine healing; and gave weekly invitations declaring "With all eyes open, all heads up and everyone looking around, if you're ready to surrender your life totally to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then stand unashamedly and boldly let the world know your allegiance to Him!"

What made this all the more amazing was that we never advertised or promoted, and about 90 per cent of the attendees and "seekers" were from that self-conscious, "don't make me do anything embarrassing" demographic of young people around 12 to 29 years of age.

## **Return to Muscular Christianity**

Many of us believe that God has given us a reprieve in America with the Trump administration. Through divine intervention, we've been given some "breathing room," not to sit back, but to take stock of the situation (which is very serious) in our

increasingly secular society.

It's imperative that we reconsecrate ourselves to intercession and make whatever adjustments are necessary to align ourselves, our families and our churches with the Jesus model laid out in the Bible, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount.

It would do us well to consider restricting our diet for a season to the wisdom and encouragement hidden in this gold mine of God's Word. Two suggested resources would be *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* by D. Martin Lloyd-Jones and *The Sermon on the Mount* by James Montgomery Boice.

Isn't it time we take seriously the "constitution of the kingdom" that Jesus outlined for those who'll "count the cost" as He said to follow Him? Isn't it also time to discard the caricature of "Christianity" many of us have known and embrace the real and truly muscular model Jesus intended? {eoa}