

Is Relevance the Church's Greatest Failure in the Last 40 Years?

Much of the church has surrendered its mantle of prophet in exchange for the title of salesman.

Relevance: One could argue it makes sense to be relevant. We want people to have a legitimate, life-altering encounter with Jesus. He will reach people at the core of who they are, and they would absolutely confess their engagement with deity would be relevant. Jesus knows how to touch people's lives in exactly the right way.

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However, what most consider relevance in today's vernacular has resulted in a deviation from the hard-core, white-hot truth of Scripture.

Check out this definition:

rel·e·vance | \ 're-lə-vən(t)s practical and especially social applicability

To meet the demands of relevance, so much of today's church has dressed up Jesus, wrapped a bow around Him and paraded Him down the fashion runway in hopes that people will like His style, that He would be appealing and sign on the dotted line of salvation. Their ultimate goal is for people to close their eyes, raise their hands and say a prayer that somehow seals their eternity with Jesus. Sadly, this method of evangelism has most probably resulted in millions of people following Jesus in an unsaved condition. There are many "rich young rulers" out there who have been welcomed with open arms by today's preachers but who have not surrendered all.

Relevance has required that we lay down our mantle as a prophetic people who boldly preach soul-piercing truth in favor of the methods of a salesman. The result is innumerable people being added to an ever-increasing lukewarm stew that will soon be vomited out of God's mouth. Relevance has neutered the church and has drained it of its power.

The Christian Rock Lesson

Somewhere around 40 years ago, give or take a few, the phenomena of Christian rock emerged. As a youth pastor in the '90s, I preached multiple times about Christian rock and the risk it presented. My belief is that music was never intended as an evangelism tool. Christian rock violated the original purpose of music as God intended. Music in its purest form is anointed, glorious worship. Personally, my life is strengthened when I pump my spirit full of supernatural music that's devoted to exalting God. I'm listening to some old-school Vineyard music from the '90s as I write this. (It doesn't get much better than that!)

The fruit of this spiritualized, worldly amusement includes a Christian culture that has no issue with secular music today. Pastors and worship leaders are often drawing from that ungodly well, giving no thought to the source of their entertainment. Add to that immoral movies, television and online media, and you have a compromised church that has lost its oil, if not its lampstand.

As a youth pastor, intense worship, powerful deliverance, baptisms in the Holy Spirit, fervent prayer and visitations of God marked our culture. We had no need or desire to tone things down in the hopes that people would give a thumbs-up to an altered form of Jesus and jump on board. While we must weep and mourn when people reject Jesus, we must also allow them to walk away if they aren't interested in surrendering all, signing up as martyrs and truly following God on his terms.

Attempting to sell the “Christian thing” with movie nights, parties, skits, ice-breakers, “Christianized secular music” and other attempts at relevance are foolish at best, devastating at worst. Hit your face, tremble under the weight of the Holy Spirit, get saturated with His glory and then worship and preach on fire—and watch those who are truly hungry rush in.

Seeker-Sensitive Everything

Additionally, the primary church service wasn’t meant to be an evangelism tool. Yet, we have all watched seeker-sensitive churches emerge and thrive as prayer and the activity of the Holy Spirit took a back seat to coffee, music and human interest stories from the platform.

We must see the invisible, supernatural realm manifest in the earth again! We have become experts at using psychological, sociological mind tricks in an attempt to connect with people and to compel them to consider Jesus. The seeker-sensitive train wreck has impacted nearly every corner and crevice of today’s church as we attempt to sell Jesus, sell our church and sell salvation.

What happened to revival? What about the indescribable glory of God that should be flooding our churches? Where are the manifestations? Tongues of fire? In most churches, quenched. All of it. Why? Because it’s not relevant according to the expectations of today’s culture. Manifestations of the Holy Spirit irritate the pretenders in the church and repel the mockers outside the church. Instead, many church leaders have adopted an often “successful” model of ministry that fills the seats while dumbing Jesus down and deeming the church impotent.

We Are Not Salesmen

We need preachers who have the unction of the Holy Spirit in their gut and the fire of the Holy Spirit in their mouths!

Our goal is not to rack up points for every soul “saved.” We must present truth and make it hard—not easy—for people to decide whether they want to follow Jesus or not.

Jesus died for you; what else could you want? That’s a legitimate evangelism question. You see, none of us have bargaining power. We don’t have leverage. We can’t haggle. We don’t have the option of jumping in at a lesser level. Without Jesus, we will be tortured and tormented every second of every day for ever and ever. We don’t have a say in how we connect with Jesus. It’s everything or nothing. It’s full surrender or no surrender. It’s radical repentance or no repentance. It’s all or nothing.

I explained the extreme cost of following Jesus to a co-worker many years ago. I revealed the difficulties and the glories. I highlighted the issue of sin, God’s solution and the permanence of eternity. I made it clear that life would be more challenging than he could ever imagine should he follow Jesus. Many friends may leave him. He might be lonely. His life of darkness would have to be abandoned. The love of God and the severity of God was presented unapologetically.

You see, I was honest with him. I didn’t hold back. I revealed the indescribable invasion of life that Jesus alone can bring, but I didn’t parade Jesus as a spectacle, as someone other than He truly is. I certainly didn’t want it on my record that I led someone into an illegitimate relationship with Jesus. He understood without question what it was to follow Jesus. His response to me was equally honest. He said, “I just can’t do that right now. I don’t want to surrender my way of life to follow Jesus.”

I honored him for his honesty and let him know that Jesus was pursuing him. I pray he ultimately made the right decision and is an on-fire disciple of Jesus today as I believe the Holy Spirit used me to present to him a solid foundation to start from.

Wholesale Change of Our Ministry Methods

It's beyond time that we learned the Christian rock, seeker-sensitive lessons. We are not of this world. We should stop mimicking it. We are aliens. We need an Area 51 experience as a curious people flock to look at the spectacle of an alien culture that doesn't try to blend in to society. Revival will do that. In Acts 2, many people marveled and many mocked when they saw the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. They were provoked by the aliens.

If you truly want to win the lost, then do away with delusions of relevance. Preach on fire. Pray on fire. Evangelize on fire. Worship on fire. Do everything on fire! We need to turn the temperature up, not down, when attempting to reach the lost. Too many have built a bonfire where people can warm their flesh when God has called us to surrender fully to the refining fire, to lay across it and die.

"They were all amazed and perplexed, saying to each other, 'What does this mean?' Others mocking said, 'These men are full of new wine'" (Acts 2:12-13). {eo}