

12 Stumbling Blocks to the Gospel for This Generation

I preach in a lot of different places, have been involved in evangelism and have overseen a local church for more than three decades. I have often found that it is not the gospel that turns people off, but the people carrying the gospel who turn them off.

It is my opinion that church leadership should remove as many unnecessary stumbling blocks as possible so that as many as possible can be saved.

The following 12 points are based on conversations I have had with millennial leaders as well as the average person on the street:

1. An overemphasis on money – I have been in some services in which the offering took more than 30 minutes, and it was not a special service but the norm. In other services, it was common to collect three offerings or more! This gives new people the impression that the church leadership is more concerned with collecting money than in preaching the gospel.

This also leaves the church open to suspicion regarding their motives. I believe money and stewardship should be taught regularly, and at times fundraising should be a focal point for in church gatherings, but it should never consistently rival the time given to preaching and teaching the Word of God.

2. The opulent lifestyle of the leadership – In many cases, the lavish lifestyle of the pastor and top leaders is a huge stumbling block for the gospel. I believe God wants His children blessed, but the pastor and leaders should model a lifestyle of simplicity and not extravagance especially if they lead churches in poor communities. The apostles Peter and

Paul both stated that greed should not be a trait of church elders (1 Pet. 5:2; 1 Tim. 3:3.)

3. Scandals – In this day and age, any fool can post something scandalous on social media about a church or leader that has no basis in the truth. These are things we cannot always avoid; hence, this is why you should not be quick to believe what people post about others! However, when leaders don't have proper boundaries in their finances and personal life, they tend to cross the line in both.

These are the ones that are ripe for a public scandal. Since the huge televangelist scandals of the 1980s to the present, scandals give the unbeliever another excuse not to repent and believe the gospel. Every leader should be careful what they text, email, post and say in public and private. They should also have a strong interior life in which they walk in the fear of the Lord, which enables all of us to depart from evil (Prov. 16:6).

4. Duplicitous behavior. When children of believers and or the unsaved witness ungodly behavior from their co-workers, employees, neighbors and friends who claim to be Christians, it is a huge stumbling block to the gospel.

5. Religious titles – Many millennials in certain communities are turned off by the excessive use of elaborate religious hierarchical titles. In some religious settings, every body has a title like bishop, apostle, doctor, reverend and archbishop. Young people are especially turned off by the need for this kind of identification for self-validation.

6. Religious language – People in this generation are not as religious as the previous generation and feel disconnected when a believer constantly uses religious language in everyday communication. We have to learn to communicate using the "language of Babylon" if we are going to make strong connections with this generation. We have to teach believers

how to “think biblically but speak secularly” if the gospel is going to make inroads in culture.

7. Religious images of power – Vestiges of authority and power in the church turn off many young people. They more easily relate to down-to-Earth, transparent leadership. When they see thrones on a church stage in which leaders are elevated above the congregation with pastors preaching (down) at the congregation, it gives them the wrong impression of leadership and is a quick turnoff.

8. Religious behavior – Sometimes in church the people have so many protocols, traditions and rituals, it scares new people into thinking they have to become religious robots in order to believe. We need to show the world the difference between being religious (which does not save or sanctify a person) and having a relationship with the Lord Jesus.

9. Territorial emphasis over kingdom focus – Many are turned off to the gospel when they see leadership merely focused on their own agenda and building programs and not for the good of their community. God called us to serve our communities not just build larger church buildings.

10. Programs over people – Many people are turned off to the gospel when they see the church focus more on events and programs than on relating one on one to people.

11. Triumphalism – Many young people are turned off to triumphalist prayers and pronouncements about taking cities and nations back for God. They feel called to serve their community but not to take it over by force. We in the church have to be careful with the kind of language we use to communicate our vision.

12. No community and authenticity – What people crave for the most is community. Everyone needs to feel loved and to belong to an entity greater than him or herself. Part of the call of the church is to assimilate new believers into the visible

body of Christ through relationships and discipleship. When people come to the church and only experience program based Christianity, they will eventually leave and look for a real community in which to belong. {eoa}

Joseph Mattera is an internationally known author, futurist, interpreter of culture and activist/theologian whose mission is to influence leaders who influence nations. He leads several organizations, including The United States Coalition of Apostolic Leaders (). He also has a blog on Charisma magazine called "The Pulse." To order one of his books or to subscribe to his weekly newsletter, go to .