

8 Reasons Why the Church Lost the Culture Wars in North America

It is evident that the Bible-confessing church has been losing cultural influence over the past several decades.

At the turn of the 20th century, Judeo-Christian values were promoted in this nation. By the 1950s, they were celebrated. By the '70s and '80s, they were tolerated, and by the late 2000s, they were hated in popular secular culture.

While there are many reasons for this, I will talk about only a few reasons in this article. The following are some of the reasons why the Bible-confessing church has lost the culture wars. (By using the word "lost," I do not mean that I believe it is a done deal, but for now, it has lost its cultural influence.)

1. Pastors abandoned the gospel of the kingdom. Since the end of the Civil War in the late 19th century, the church has replaced preaching the kingdom of God to focus on waiting for the rapture. This new focus led the church to go from cultural engagement to cultural escape. This resulted in almost all elite higher learning institutions being taken over by secular humanists in the 1920s. Secular humanism became the religion of choice amongst the cultural elite way before it became mainstream in America. It took only one generation before students' mass inculcation resulted in the sexual or cultural revolution during the mid-'60s. Now our nation is being ideologically led by the children of the '60s rebellion.

2. The Johnson amendment accomplished the author's desired goal. The 1954 Johnson amendment resulted in the legal possibility of revoking the 501(c)(3) nonprofit status of churches if they engaged in endorsing a candidate or political

activity. Before this law, congregations looked forward to hearing from the pastor regarding the biblical position of political candidates before they decided to vote. Nowadays, despite most Christians desiring political input from their pastors, pastors have remained silent on the significant cultural and political issues of the day for fear of their church losing its tax-exempt status. This silence has effectively taken the Bible out of the public square and left a vacuum that humanists have been glad to fill.

3. Church growth became more important than making disciples.

Starting in the late '60s and early '70s, the church growth phenomena hit the Christian scene. There was a noble attempt to make the church more relevant to the unchurched. This attempt had good results as well as bad ones. Among the bad results was the fact that many preachers began watering down their messages. Many pulpits went from powerful doctrinal preaching to sharing a contemporary salvation message that did not feed nor challenge the flock. Worse yet, many of these churches did not have a weekday service or discipleship program to compensate for their weak Sunday sermon. The catastrophic result has been a focus on gathering crowds instead of making disciples. Only true disciples of Christ can make disciples of others and thus change the world.

4. The left was more committed. Those on the left, including gay activist organizations, have been more committed to their cause than the church. While most pastors were only focused on their church's success, the far-left activists were busy building coalitions, raising money and reaching the cultural mountains of music, arts and entertainment. In turn, this affected the thinking of every other cultural mountain such as politics, law, ethics, education, religion and policy.

5. The church became relevant instead of reforming. The church's shift toward being seeker-sensitive shifted the church's focus from theological messages to therapeutic motivational messages. In their search to reach more people

and be more relevant, the church ceased being cultural reformers, thus losing cultural influence.

6. Believers used God to chase the American dream. Many believers took the motivational message to another extreme by distorting Scripture to justify chasing the American dream of personal affluence and comfort. They began using their faith more for personal prosperity. They wanted to claim a blessing rather than preach the gospel and advance His kingdom. This self-focus became more like the American dream and less like biblical Christianity. This narcissistic approach further eroded the church's role as the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

7. Christians on the right focused only on politics. In the late '70s, a remnant of pastors was getting upset by the apparent demise of Judeo/Christian values in culture. As a result, they created organizations like the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition. Although these organizations may have been responsible for a short resurgence of Christian activism (which many claim resulted in Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump's elections) it was not enough.

Numerous Christian leaders focused on politics while excluding other areas of culture. Politics is only a reflection of the cultural morals and is not responsible for formulating them. Culture is formed from the ground up through media, music, arts, entertainment and, most importantly, through education. When you focus on politics and neglect these other cultural spheres, you will have short-term victories, but you will lose in the long term. Many in the world with a different political perspective than the conservative church feel alienated because those preaching the gospel seem to push a political candidate they may dislike.

8. The evangelical church has been divided politically. While many white evangelicals think the most important issues are gay marriage, pro-abortion laws and the selection of future

Supreme Court justices, many Bible-believing people of color believe economic and social justice issues are the most important. They believe systemic poverty is the primary cause of abortion, crime and the deterioration of their quality of life. Conservatives believe that big government solutions to poverty, education and social service benefits have done more harm than good to minority communities.

Christians on the right generally believe tax cuts stimulate economic growth, which benefits all communities. Christians on the left believe that social justice for the poor has to include state government intervention and some form of redistribution of wealth because the private sector is only focused on making money. They say the “trickle-down” economic policies only aid the wealthiest in the nation. Although most Bible-believing Christians agree on morality issues, including abortion and traditional marriage, their divergent strategy on tackling the other problems causes them to be politically divided. This division dissipates the national influence and voice of the body of Christ. Consequently, Christians on the right tend to vote Republican, while Christians on the left generally vote Democratic.

This article aims not to promote any particular issue but to help the reader understand why I believe the church is so divided in politics. Of course, this political divide has also caused a tremendous relational chasm between these various Christian groups. Until this divide is healed, the political voice of the body of Christ will be minimal. If this divide ever mends, the church will once again be the most potent voice in culture both nationally and globally. {eoa}

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