

Cosmetic Christianity

People often ask me if I see any new trends developing in the American church. Recently a pastor posed that question, expecting me to tell him about some new church-growth method. He was dumbfounded by my answer: “Yeah, I’m noticing that more Christians are getting cosmetic surgery.”

It wasn’t the response he wanted to hear, but we had a lively discussion when I told him about one prominent charismatic church where all the women on staff—and the wives of all the pastors—have had breast-enhancement surgery.

Maybe you’ve noticed that some talk shows on Christian television are starting to resemble episodes of Extreme Makeover. Sagging chins have been reshaped, tummies have been tucked, and entire bodies have been reconstructed.

One leader reportedly has sponsored a seminar on plastic surgery. And one male evangelist paid for expensive chest implants because he couldn’t grow big enough pectoral muscles from his weight-lifting routine.

I admit I’m concerned. If the preacher is plastic, what does that tell us about his preaching?

I don’t want to start a war over cosmetic surgery because the Bible doesn’t specifically prohibit liposuction or collagen implants. Fifty years ago Christians judged other Christians for wearing jewelry, and pastors told women not to wear pants or makeup. I’m glad those days are over.

But on the other hand, does it seem bizarre to you that leaders in the church will spend thousands of dollars to look 10 years younger? Try explaining their behavior to Christians in Pakistan, Uganda or Croatia, where the price of one face-lift would support a pastor and his family for a year.

There's nothing wrong with wanting to look nice, and Lord knows many of us need to stop our Sunday after-church visits to Barnside Buffet (Their motto: "We'll make you as big as a barn!"). But while we are shedding our extra pounds and becoming more disciplined, let's also remember that we're not going to stop the aging process.

Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Cor. 6:19), so we should make it our goal to eat right, exercise and follow God's principles of healthy living. I don't think God is glorified when we are overweight, lazy or addicted to food.

But something is very wrong when Christians refuse to grow up and instead become obsessed with appearance. When holiness becomes a lower priority than sex appeal, it's a sure sign that we are running from maturity.

The brave Christian leaders I have met in the developing world—those who risk their lives each day to preach the gospel—find it disconcerting that we Americans place so much value on youthfulness and perfect abs. They are looking for some wrinkled, gray-haired mentors who have proven character.

Meanwhile we are worrying more about what's on the outside. Our faith has become cosmetic when the world is crying out for answers that offer substance and significance.

The American church definitely needs a makeover, but I don't think a face-lift is what God has in mind. We need something more than superficial surgery.

My prayer is that He will cut deep to remove the self-worship that is growing like a cancer in our hearts. Are you willing to go under His knife?