

Has the Church Outgrown the Gospel?

By: David Flatt

Has the Church outgrown the Gospel? Perhaps some think this is a silly question to propose in a church bulletin. But, really, has the Church outgrown the Gospel? Churches are constantly trying to find relevancy in their communities. They want to grow and remain viable. This is especially true today, as churches are in a state of decline. But how can churches make an effective appeal to people?

Churches do all sorts of things to gain attention and demonstrate cultural relevancy. Some churches become socially and politically active. Twenty years ago, the government began to incentivize “faith-based organizations” to provide for the needs of their communities.

Some churches appeal strongly to families. They want to help strengthen marriages and sculpt well-rounded children. They conduct marriage and parenting seminars. They offer all kinds of camps and special evenings for the youth to socialize.

Some churches try to keep the interest of their members and appeal to the community through special events. They invite speakers to lecture about their areas of expertise. Archeologists will come to speak about the latest discoveries from the ancient world. Scientists will come to demonstrate how science supports the Bible. Financial planners come to discuss the dangers of debt. Psychologists will come to speak about the dangers of addiction.

This describes the focus of many churches today. They have unknowingly shifted their focus away from the Gospel in the hopes of growing. Some want social respectability and political leverage. Others just want to keep the interest of their members. They want life-coaches, authors, bloggers, and podcasters. They do not want Gospel preachers.

Now, let’s ask the question again: Has the Church outgrown the Gospel?

1. This is not a new problem. Paul dealt with churches that thought they had outgrown the Gospel. The church at Corinth is a prime example. They wanted to fit in with the culture. They wanted the wisdom of the age, not the Gospel. They wanted philosophers and orators, not Gospel preachers. Their focus had shifted away from the cross of Christ.

To this point, Paul wrote, “When I came to you, brothers, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:1-2).

What would Paul think about what is being promoted in churches today? The cross of Jesus is to be the framework for our teaching. The cross of Jesus is the most distinctive feature of the Church. The cross alone gives the Church its identity. When the cross of Jesus is moved to the periphery of a church and its teaching, the church will lose its relevancy.

2. Defining the Gospel. The Gospel is not whatever we make it. The Gospel is not advice. The Gospel is not a self-help philosophy. The Gospel is the news of what God accomplished for humanity through Jesus by His crucifixion and resurrection.

Later in the letter, Paul reminded them of the message he had brought to Corinth: “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared...” (1 Cor. 15:3-5).

The Gospel is about a specific set of facts and events. Gospel preaching is about what the facts mean in our lives and our world. How many seminars, special events, guest lecture series, and Gospel meetings have churches conducted where the Gospel was never preached?

3. Getting back to the Gospel. Christians and churches need to get back to the Gospel. They need to get back to Gospel preaching. Why? The world is lost in sin! Have we forgotten what the Bible plainly teaches: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16).

People will not be saved from sin because they believe science and the Bible can coexist. People will not be saved from eternal death because of what someone excavated in the desert. People will only be saved by faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

We need to be preaching about what happened at the cross of Jesus. In our teaching, we need to be asking how the cross of Jesus is to affect how we live our lives. This is what Paul did in his teaching and writing. When we tell other people about our church, we need to boast about the cross of Jesus.

“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14).

Conclusion: This article is not intended to be a harsh, judgmental assessment of the Church. This article intends to get us to reevaluate our focus. The devil works in subtle ways. The Bible teaches about family life, social and political engagement, financial responsibility, and many other subjects. However, these topics are not central to the Bible. The cross of Christ is at the heart of the Bible.

The devil is satisfied when churches focus on peripheral matters. He will be content when we emphasize peripheral matters at the exclusion of the cross of Christ. He will be happy for us to promote topics we find interesting at the exclusion of the cross of Christ.

The Church has not outgrown the Gospel. The Gospel remains God’s power to save us from sin and eternal death. The Gospel is relevant in the lives of sinners. Christians need the Gospel as the path to becoming more like our self-giving Savior. May we never lose sight of the Gospel.

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