

Big Q's?

Part 8: Un-Christian...What the De-Churched Think of Christianity August 29, 2010

Christianity has an image problem. For many people, their emotional and intellectual barriers go up when they are around Christians. Bottom line: They reject Jesus (and His church) because they feel rejected by Christians. They hold stereotypes of Christians, and we make assumptions about them! We can get defensive and say “they are too sensitive”, or we can try to understand why they feel the way they do. What are their common perceptions? Why such negativity?

I. 2 General Perceptions

A. Disclaimer

1. You may not like the stereotypes. Don't shoot the messenger because of the message.
2. Not looking to give a book report, but the statistical data is overwhelming.
3. Ask yourself not what you can learn today, but rather what can I do?
4. Clarify the use of the words insider vs. outsider.

B. We are known more for what we oppose, rather than what or who we are for.

1. Christian means very conservative, entrenched in their thinking, anti gay, anti choice, angry, violent, illogical empire builders; they want to convert everyone, and they generally cannot live peacefully with anyone who doesn't believe what they believe. (Unchristian, p. 26).
2. Most “outsiders” are equal parts indifferent as they are overtly hostile. How could Jesus be a “friend of sinners” and yet we as His followers be perceived so differently?
3. Jesus was concerned about His Father's reputation. Are we concerned about His?

- C. When they see Christians not acting like Jesus, they quickly assume we deserve an “un-Christian” label.
1. They say Christianity has been “corrupted” (ex. like a computer file). It is not what Jesus intended.
 2. 25% believe that Christianity has changed for the worse. It is off track and modern day Christianity no longer seems Christian.
 3. One-fifth of all outsiders, regardless of age, admitted they “*have had a bad experience in a church or with a Christian that gave them a negative image of Jesus Christ.*” p.31
 4. The three most common perceptions of present-day Christianity are anti-homosexual (an image held by 91 percent of young outsiders), judgmental (87 percent), and hypocritical (85 percent). Out of the top 12 perceptions of Christianity, nine of the dozen views were negative. (p. 27)

II. Six Specific Problems: Christians are...

A. **Hypocritical:**

1. They believe we say one thing and do or live another. They are also skeptical of our morally superior attitudes. Our polished image doesn't seem real. They believe that the church is only for morally pure people. 85%
2. An alternative: Maybe we can be more transparent about our “flaws”. We need to act first and talk 2nd.
 - It is not that we aren't perfect. In fact, outsiders are looking for transparency. Admitting the struggles we have makes us approachable.
 - Professing something that you don't really believe is another. Ex. Railing against pornography but secretly addicted to it yourself.
 - Remember: Many outsiders, were former insiders who got disillusioned with they saw or experienced.

- Are we trying to “practice what we preach”? Christians fail to be different than their non Christian counterparts....statistically there was no difference in whether they gambled, consulted psychic, used drugs, gossiped, etc.
- Jesus was criticized too; but not for being hypocritical. His strongest rebukes were for the Pharisaical, religious elite, not those who were unbelievers.

B. Conversion driven:

1. They believe that we are too focused on getting converts. They wonder if we genuinely care about them and often feel like targets instead of people. Many have “tried” Jesus and question our motives for wanting to “save” them.
2. An alternative: Cultivate genuine relationships and environments where others can be deeply transformed by God.
 - Only 34% believe that Christians generally cared about them. The most effective efforts to share faith are interpersonal and relationship based.
 - When we asked born-again Busters to identify the activity, ministry event, or person most directly responsible for their decision to accept Jesus Christ, 71 percent listed an individual—typically their parent, a friend, another relative, or a teacher. p.70
 - Remember for young adults in particular “process trumps product” and the journey is more important than the destination.
 - John Mayer’s song “Belief” (off the Continuum CD) expresses this well: “*Belief is a beautiful armor, but makes for the heaviest sword*”.

C. **Anti-homosexual:**

1. They believe we hate gays and lesbians are at the very least “bigoted” towards them. We are accused of trying to “fix or heal” them and ultimately are waging a battle against them politically.
2. An alternative: Show compassion and love to all people, regardless of their lifestyle.
 - Listen to my sermon on July 25, 2110 for our approach to reaching and loving the gay community.
 - Question: Who are the “unlovely” people in your life? Who fits in the least, the last and the lost?

D. **Sheltered:**

1. We are out of touch with reality, old-fashioned, and just downright boring! We are overly simplistic in our approach to life’s problems and unwilling to get our “hands dirty” with the grit and grime of people’s lives.
 - Two-thirds of young outsiders said the faith is boring, a description embraced by one-quarter of young churchgoers as well. (Pg 123)
 - Many feel that we have checked our brains in at the door. Christianity stifles curiosity...it makes people brain dead. The perception is that we aren’t thinkers!
2. An alternative: Be engaged and informed about the issues of the day.
 - Avoid giving simplistic answers to complex questions. Listen to the questions openly, admitting you don’t have all the answers.
 - Make time for “outsiders”. Clear room in your schedule!
 - Does fear control your life? Sequestered? I John 4:18; II Tim. 1:7? Are you sheltering your kids from the world because of fear?

3. What does it mean to be salt and light? Matt. 5:13-16? Being Salt light demands 2 things: we must practice purity in the midst of a fallen world and yet we live in proximity to this fallen world. We must live with the tension of “in” not “of”.
 - Purity - Proximity = **Isolation**: Pietistic, separated, aloof, and conceited. Apart from culture! We are *indifferent* to the Culture.
 - Proximity – Purity = **Imitation**: Tainted, useless and compromised. We are indistinguishable from culture. We are *immersed* in it.
 - Purity + Proximity = **Infiltration**. We live in the world but not like the world. We *influence* the culture!

E. **Too political**:

1. We are too motivated by our political agenda and are puppets of the political right. They believe that right wing politics and church go hand in hand.
 - One-fifth of all American adults (21 percent) believe “the political efforts of conservative Christians are a major problem facing the country today. Half of the adult population (48 percent) describe the political involvement of Christians as a concern. More than 110 million adult Americans admit they maintain misgivings about the role of “conservative Christians” in politics. (Pg. 156)

2. An alternative: Respect people across the political spectrum by engaging them in dialogue (not diatribe). This means thinking Biblically (worldview) and be willing to find solutions to complex issues.

- Don't assume everyone in the church is a Republican. Chuck Colson says, "It is a huge mistake to become married to an ideology, because the greatest enemy of the gospel is ideology". We need spiritual revelation more than political revelation. Ultimate change happens spiritually in the souls of men not in the political process of winning elections. Jesus changes lives one person at a time!
- Don't be ugly and rude to those who hold to a differing political view. We may not see eye to eye, but rather let's make sure our eyes are focused on Jesus.
- We pray for our leaders regardless of political affiliation (I Tim. 2:1-3).

F. **Judgmental:**

1. They believe that we are too quick to judge others. They doubt that we love people the way we say we do. They think we are prideful and quick to find fault in others.
 - Nearly nine out of ten young outsiders (87 percent) said that the term judgmental accurately describes present-day Christianity. (Pg 182)
 - A majority of outsiders (57 percent) say Christians are quick to find fault with others. (Pg 184)
2. An alternative: Show grace to outsiders by seeing their potential to be Christ followers.
 - How we communicate is **as** important about **what** we communicate. Grace and truth; Speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).
 - Are we trying to prove we are right or God is right? Are we interested in engaging in genuine dialogue or just persuasion sessions aimed at winning the debate? Are we more concerned about being right or really listening? It is not enough to be right, you have to be redemptive.

- Are more known for *talking* about issues or *doing* something about them?
 - Why did Jesus hang out with the “scandalized and marginalized” of society?
 - Realize how pride and arrogance fuels judgementalism.
3. A Dangerous Compromise
- Some well intentioned Christians “hijack” Jesus and make him into an “open-minded, big hearted and never-offended moral teacher”. Simply “softening” the gospel or reshaping the gospel is an utterly wrong response to the objections people raise.
 - Why does it happen? We are perceived as being aloof. People want to “create your own Savior mindset”. We make Jesus who we want Him to be, because we aren’t convinced either.

III. Moving From UnChristian to Christian

Not just a rhetorical question. How can we move from UnChristian to Christian? So really... can I make a difference?

- A. It’s about your **availability** not your ability! What is God calling you to?
- B. We need to **BE** the church, not just GO to church! Being the church is reaching lost people who are far from God.
1. Is it the poor or afflicted? Is. 58:10; Luke 4:18
 2. Is it our “enemies”? Matt. 5:44
 3. Is it the least of these? Mt. 25:34-40
 4. Is it giving up your life? John. 15:13
- C. Replace judgment with **kindness**
1. “Knowing that the kindness of God leads us to repentance” Rom. 2:4
 2. Kindness overcomes the stereotypes, fear, hurt feelings form the past, etc.

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