

The Emergent and the Out-Dated Christian

--By Terry Carter



No doubt you are familiar with the parable that Jesus told about the Pharisee and the Publican who went to the temple to pray.

"9 And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men [are], extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. 12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. 13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as [his] eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified [rather] than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." **Luke 18:9-14 KJV**

What you may not know about is the new version of this parable. It's about an Emergent and an Out-Dated Christian who began to pray. It goes something like this...

"9 And He spoke this parable unto certain who trusted in themselves that they were relevant and authentic and looked down their noses at the unenlightened, old-fashioned, frankly square Christians in their grandmother's churches: 10 Two people began to pray;

one a hip, liberated, Emergent, Christ-Follower, and the other a stiff, tradition-bound, Christian. 11 The Emergent walked in a labyrinth and prayed in her deeply spiritual meditative state thusly, 'Great Spirit in the Sky, I thank you that I am not as mainstream churches are, irrelevant, intolerant, judgmental, political, boring, or even as this out-dated Christian. 12 I finger paint twice a week, I incorporate hip-hop music in my worship, I welcome homosexuals and Muslims into my fellowship, I profess global warming and celebrate earth day, I have twelve tattoos and ten body piercing, I drink alcohol socially and worship in bars, I encourage women to lead in the church over men, I watch R-rated movies, I reject the notion of facts, I never dress up for worship, I use the words 'missional', 'community', 'relationship', and 'dance' frequently, I search for truth even though it can't actually be found, I always talk about how little I know while being sure that I know more than other poor, unenlightened souls, I share my story and listen to the stories of others in this journey and conversation we are in, my favorite movies are *The Matrix* and *Alice in Wonderland*, I embrace post-modernism and decry imperialism'. 13 And the out-dated Christian stood out in the sticks in his small rural church building and would not so much as read Brian McClaren's latest book, but clung to his New Testament, saying, 'God be merciful to me an unprofitable servant.' 14 I tell you that this man went to his house forgiven rather than the other: for everyone who conforms to society shall be converted to it, but he that obeys My Words will be converted to Me."

Lest you think that I am making this up, let me quote to you from a door hanger that a local congregation has been distributing in my hometown. What follows is a word-for-word quote; only the names have been changed to protect the guilty.

"The myth: All churches are judgmental, boring, political, intolerant, and irrelevant. We dare you to prove this myth wrong by going to the brook: casual, relevant, authentic. First, let's be honest, many churches are judgmental, boring and all that crap [yes they used that word]. But the brook is a newer church now meeting at Peak Middle School. It will explode the negative stereotypes you've had of church. In fact, it's a church for people who don't like church. We're pretty sure you'll actually enjoy and get something out of it, and if you don't ummmm, whoops, sorry."

The reverse side had a package of Pop Rocks candy and said the following:

"The myth: Eating Pop Rocks and Coke together will kill you. We dare you to prove this myth wrong by eating these Pop Rocks with some Coke. We're pretty sure you won't die and, if you do, ummmm, whoops, sorry!"

Underneath the package of Pop Rocks it says, *"If your Pop Rocks candy is missing, check with the middle school kid down the road!"*

I wonder if it was a middle school kid that put this door hanger together. I also wonder if they take people's salvation as lightly as they take their lives. I can just picture them saying, "We're pretty sure you can swallow false teaching and not die, and if you do, ummmm whoops, sorry!"

This is just one of many examples of a group that loudly and boldly claims that they are relevant and authentic. A couple of thoughts occur to me about this.

First - Proclaiming yourself to be "authentic" is somewhat like proclaiming yourself to be "humble".

The longer and louder you say it, the less I believe it. It's a bit like sounding a trumpet before you do a charitable deed or praying on the corner of the street to be seen by men - **Matthew 6:1-6**. I don't think authentic (meaning real) Christians spend much time telling everybody how authentic they are. They simply obey the Lord's commands and let Him decide if they are authentic or not.

Second - Being relevant depends entirely upon to what or whom you want to be relevant.

I teach high school math and science. Everyday students complain that the class material is not relevant to them at all. They don't believe that it is relevant to them now, nor do they believe it will be relevant to them in the future. But after they graduate they soon sing another tune. A semester or two of college convinces them that what I taught them was very relevant to their future. Suddenly these things are vitally important. I've even had some students complain that I wasn't hard enough on them. They wish I had required them to learn more of this "irrelevant" stuff.

The problem is that while they are in high school they don't know what is relevant and what is not. Once they discover what is truly relevant and what is not, it's too late.

I wonder how much of what people believe to be relevant to them is relevant to God. I wonder how much of it is relevant to their eternal futures. I wonder how many things that are relevant to God and their eternal salvation are things they consider irrelevant now. How many will face an eternity in hell having spent all their time and energy on what they thought was relevant, but was not?

Unfortunately it will be too late to do anything about it then. Personally, I prefer to trust God to tell me what is relevant and what is not. He's done this already in His Word.

Third - Saying that "...many churches are judgmental, boring, and all that crap", sounds kind of judgmental and even intolerant to me. Maybe the pot is calling the kettle black here.

Fourth - While the door hanger I quoted above did not say that your grandmother's church is irrelevant, I've heard such statements in many other places and I believe the door hanger implied it.

I'm tired of hearing about how irrelevant your grandmother's church was and is. Evidently it's not irrelevant to your grandmother. If you give it a chance you might discover that it's not irrelevant to you, either. If the Gospel is being preached, it is relevant. If the Gospel is not being preached at your church, it is about as irrelevant as you can get. I'll take granny's Gospel preaching church over some hip church without the Gospel any day.

Here's a novel idea: Let's stop throwing around buzzwords like "relevant" and "authentic" and start obeying the commands of God. Let's make His Word the priority. Let God decide what is relevant and who is authentic.

The only way I know to be truly relevant and authentic is to preach and practice God's Word.

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