

Blocking Truth: Unchangeable “Christian” Church Ways

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I wondered how often how we “do” church or live out faith before the world gives reason for people to reject Christ?¹ We’ve all seen it: people blame the church or Christians—the way they act contrary to the Bible, lack love, backbite, can be petty—as excuses for their not wanting to associate with the church or Jesus.

In order to move beyond that kind of behavior (as well as history of Christianity, with its positive and negative impact) believers have increasingly sought to describe their faith in different terms. We speak of things like being a “follower of Jesus” instead of a “Christian.” We talk about fellowships rather than churches. Some strongly believe in house churches, which keep the fellowship smaller and avoid the problems that buildings can cause.² In missions, we promote such attempts. Assuming it doesn’t avoid the clear teaching of Scripture, we are all for this kind of contextualization.

Recently, a good friend of mine (who is mobilizing for the Unreached in another country) conducted an informal survey. He was preparing to share with a youth group, and his quick, informal, non-scientific survey of 100 of his mission-connected friends had just one question. We could only give one answer of four words or less. The question was (in short³):

Why haven’t we finished the task Jesus gave to us to get the gospel to every people?

- The top response with **28%** was **“Sin/disobedience.”**
- Second: **“Wrong Priorities” 25%.**
- Third: **“Understanding the Task” 22%.**
- Fourth: **“Lack of Vision” 13%.**
- Fifth: **“Church Division” 3%** and finally: **“Other (Individual Responses)” 9%.**

My response, which fit under the “Other” category was: **Unchangeable “Christian” church ways.**

The first five replies are potential factors. We mobilizers need to do a better job of sharing with those who are not involved yet. And there are people, churches, individuals who should be much more serious (or repentant!?) about the spread of the church where the gospel has made little or no impact.

When I replied “Unchangeable ‘Christian’ church ways,” I was considering the on-the-ground realities among the unreached. Yes, we need more workers, more global partners engaged and more believers aware and praying for that vast majority of the remaining Unreached that do not know that Jesus visited the earth. But we must grapple with what those workers actually do when they get onsite. We do not just need more workers—we need workers that are doing different things in different ways.

We must think more deeply about how we share our faith and gather together. That is a basic idea, yet how often do we see churches doing things the exact same way they do in their Western home culture. Examples include: worship music (perhaps translated) and literate teaching (instead of using oral methods). We must contextualize and de-Westernize or replace unhelpful patterns.

Just last night, a brother from the Middle East was sharing at an event in the U.S. Recently, a Muslim woman asked why Jesus would come to her in a dream (she had this happen twice in the previous month). He turned to Revelation 3:20, like many of us have. But, unlike many Americans, he was sure to finish the verse “...I will come into him and eat with him, and he with me.” To anyone from the Middle East, eating together is a profound statement of family acceptance—in feeling at home with someone. She turned to Christ right then!

What examples came into your mind as you read this? Why not post your thoughts on missionfrontier.org under this issue and article? I’d love to interact with you on this and other topics we have there. 

¹ I realize that God’s timing and sovereignty is ultimately the determining factor.

² In many places among the Unreached, meeting in homes is all they can do.

³ In asking the question, he also noted God’s timing and the work of the Holy Spirit, so respondents would not give that answer.