

## Becoming More Relevant

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In this neck of the woods, “Where do you all go to church?” is usually the second or third question after “Where do you live?” or “What do you do?” Going to church is a socially-normal thing to do around here; it’s part of the culture. But “where” is probably the only biblically-based descriptor there is for this thing we call “church.” Geography is not, however, where church stops. There are denominations, and divisions within denominations, and preferred doctrines, including what other divisions are safe to associate with.

What denomination was Jesus?

Seriously.

*What really matters?*

Where are the believers (*ecclesia*) who hear the voice of God ... who do not elevate one day above another ... who do not give power (“authority”) to men who other men have elected to some “office” ... who relate together as the Body of Christ – the *ecclesia* – not as an institution?

Where are those who rejoice to find brother and sister believers ... who are not dissuaded from fellowship with them by externals (fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil) like length of hair, style of dress, form of worship, denominational membership, seminary of clergy, relative contemporaneousness of and/or musical instruments used with worship music, severity of sin in one’s past, version of bible preferred, or authoritative proclamations of “clergy” ... who understand the priesthood of the believer and who have no king but Jesus?

Those questions are problematic for the *church* ... not so much for the *ecclesia*.

Many of us were brought up to believe certain doctrines that, quite frankly, add to scripture. How long is too long? How short is too short? How much percussion is too much (too “contemporary”) to be scriptural? But there’s the rub: it’s all “doctrine” (teachings of men), and didn’t Jesus have something to say against teaching man-made doctrines as if they were the commandments of God?

Yes, Jesus had a bad habit of contradicting human doctrines, even long before they were invented. On the cross, Jesus told the thief next to him, “Today you will be with me in Paradise.” But the “Romans Road” wouldn’t be written for another 25 years, and the “Sinners Prayer” was still 18 centuries in the future! How could that thief be saved? Who did Jesus think He was, anyway!?

In the culture of church (and every church, by definition, has its own culture), the doctrines of men are a given. The Berean believers recognized that and made sure to keep scripture itself as their standard (Acts 17:11), not just their first impressions of what they heard some apparent apostle say. And it’s in that culture that the relevance of church matters.

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We can be relevant in men's terms and/or we can be relevant in God's terms. If seeking to be relevant in God's terms, church will look less like a man-made institution (church) and more like the ecclesia (bigger than church) that is described in the Bible. However, church as an institution has been around for a long time – longer than just about any other business and government structure – and, thus, enjoys some big advantages that can make it relevant in man's terms. And those aren't all negative.

Should church be relevant in terms of money, business, government, law, health, education and the arts? Does scripture have anything to say about those things? Surely it does. So to the extent that a church deals with those disciplines in terms of what scripture actually teaches, it is relevant in the terms of the Author of scripture, is it not? And those disciplines are surely relevant in men's terms, as well.

But when was the last time that anyone reading this heard a sermon about, say, nutrition ... or contract law? Both are clearly dealt with in scripture. (God has something to say about them.) Whereas the idea of a "sermon" – especially as the main event of a "church service" – being in scripture? Not so much.

Could it be that there might be better ways for a church to be relevant both in men's terms and in God's? And considering the Barna research that shows church attendance steadily dropping, might finding ways for the church to be more relevant make (good business) sense?