

# YAMs

## Summer Midweek 2010



**The Gospel, The Culture and The Church:**  
a radical reformation



yams summer midweek 2010 | wednesdays @ 6 p.m.

Week Three:

**Perceptions:** what the culture (rightly) thinks  
about the church



**covenant chapel**

## PERCEPTIONS:

This week's topic is called "Perceptions: what the culture (**rightly**) thinks about the church" because the culture's right. In reality, the Church has not done a good job in most of these aspects. And, as the Church, it is our job to live our lives in a way to help the culture overcome these perceptions so that they glorify God.

Ok, what does the culture think about the church? Well in 2007, David Kinnaman, president of the Barna research group, wrote a book called *unChristian*. In it he discusses the results of a surveys conducted among hundreds of people in America – both Christian and non-Christian. He highlights the main perceptions those outside the church – "outsiders" have about the Church and people who claim to follow Jesus.

Let's take six of these perceptions one-at-a-time, explore what they mean, what the Bible says, and how the Church can and should respond.

### 1. HYPOCRITICAL

**Definition** - Christians say one thing and do another. Yet they have morally superior attitudes. Christians pretend to be something unreal. The Church and Christianity are only for virtuous and morally pure people.

According to *unChristian*, 85 percent of outsiders who have had significant encounters with Christianity describe the Church as "hypocritical". Why is that?

Well, examining many of these surveys, the research only found three significant differences between the lifestyles of Christians and outsiders:

- Christians own more Bibles
- Christians attend church more often
- Christians donate more money to religious nonprofit organizations

That's it. All of the other lifestyle characteristics are not significantly different. And that's not referring to the broad "Christian" category. These are "born again" Christians – who through the survey have indicated they have a personal relationship with Jesus and will spend eternity in Heaven with God because they have confessed their sin and accepted Christ as Savior. CRAZY!

So, clearly, there is a huge problem here. We're either

- Not teaching biblical truth to many Christians. So when they then act like this the culture gets one picture while hearing another from Christian leaders that preach the truth of the gospel.
- Not following the truth we know. Aware of what the Bible teaches, we ignore it and lose all credibility when we invite someone to follow something even we don't.

## What does the Bible say?

Matthew 23:25-28 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."

## How do we respond?

- Teach Truth. As much as we can, we must put an end to these incorrect moral standards of other Christians.
- Practice Transparency. We must freely admit that we fall short of God's standards. We cannot stand on a false pedestal to condemn the actions of others. In bringing the gospel to the culture, we have to take the mentality of "beggars showing other beggars where to find the bread."
- Practice Grace, but not as an excuse to sin. We are saved by Grace and not by following rules. (Ephesians 2:8-9). And so we must freely give grace to each other when we fall short of God's standard. But we cannot forget God's standard in the process. That standard is holy perfection. (1 Peter 1:16)

## 2. "GET SAVED" MENTALITY

**Definition-** The Church is too focused on getting converts. Do they really care about those outside the church? Are they targets or people? The Church is only concerned with people "getting saved" even if people have already "tried" Jesus and the Church before.

In our culture, the Church has a similar perception to Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses. Rather than being interested in people, we come across as spiritual headhunters, ending relationships if people don't agree with our beliefs.

This is a difficult one, because our primary aim as followers of Christ should be helping other people come to know Christ as their Lord. So the culture is very accurate in thinking this. But we cannot forget genuine love as we seek to engage the culture with the gospel.

Research from this chapter highlights some myths most Christians have about the effectiveness of evangelism. We'll come back to these in a couple weeks when we talk about the best way to engage our culture in Kansas City. But for now, here's one:

## What does the Bible say?

- The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). We are called to invite people to embrace Jesus and the Gospel. We should not and cannot stop.

- Parable of the Sower – (Matthew 13:3-8). As we share the gospel, we will inevitably come across those who will not respond.

### How do we respond?

- Do the difficult work of building relationships. Really, it's relatively easy to put a message on TV or radio or pass out tracts. Those aren't all bad. But are they an excuse for doing the difficult work of cultivating relationships that lead people to Christ?
- Avoid the 2-minute "are you in or out?" approach. *Radical Reformation* calls this "Shotgun weddings to Jesus." Share the gospel early and often, but don't stop pursuing the relationship if they don't accept Christ.

## 3. ANTIHOMOSEXUAL

**Definition-** Christians are bigots and show disdain for gays and lesbians. Christians are fixated on curing homosexuals and leveraging political solutions against them.

Christian leaders have blamed events like September 11 and Hurricane Katrina on homosexuals – claiming that is God's judgment on them.

From the research, here are common Christian assumptions on homosexuality:

- Homosexuals are incapable of acting morally
- Homosexuals have an organized movement with the purpose of subverting conservative Christianity
- Homosexuality is a simple issue
- It's best to avoid any friendships with homosexuals

### What does the Bible say?

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 - "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God"

Homosexuality is wrong. This is not a gray area in the Bible. Our stance on that can and should not change.

Romans 3:23 – "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Regardless of the sin we struggle with, none of us are better than anyone else. The gap between perfection and imperfection is infinite.

### How do we respond?

- Stop treating Homosexuality like a "special" sin worse than others. In 1 Corinthians it's grouped with other sexual sin and other sin. Never in the Bible is it singled out as worse than others. Sleeping with your father's wife is – homosexuality is not. To condemn homosexuality but condone other sin

by our comparatively “soft” treatment, we fall right back into that Hypocritical perception.

- Love people, regardless of lifestyle. Homosexuality is a taboo topic we quickly and often run from. Don't. Embrace and love people. Seek to understand where they come from. Rather than solely condemn them, teach them what a repentant lifestyle looks like by modeling it in your own life – repenting of the sin you struggle with.

## 4. SHELTERED

**Definition-** Christians are old-fashioned, boring, and out of touch with reality. They do not respond to reality in appropriately complex ways, preferring simplistic solutions and answers. Christians are not really willing to deal with the grit and grime of people's lives.

Once Christians find the amazing fellowship that can come from other believers in the Church, there's a strong temptation to isolate from the Culture. This is understandable, but it's still wrong.

Instead of dealing with the complex issues of the people of our culture, we often offer what appears too simple a solution: accept Christ. Simple solutions to complex problems seem ignorant and inauthentic – even if they carry a lot of truth.

### What does the Bible say?

John 17:15-18 “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.”

To be sheltered opposes our purpose for being alive on this earth. If this were not the case, we should go immediately to heaven after accepting Christ.

Matthew 25:34-36 – “Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'”

We are called to right wrongs and to be Christ's instruments of love in a broken world. To hide from the pain of the world is not only ignorant, it's sinful.

### How do we respond?

- Intentionally build relationships with people who don't know Jesus. Doing so will help you get outside of the bubble, understand different perspectives, and give you a real change to show and share Christ's love

- Immerse ourselves in global issues. Human Trafficking, Poverty, World Hunger. These are huge, complex problems. To seek to right these wrongs shows outsiders that we're willing to get outside of our comfortable Christian bubbles. Plus, we're already called to act justly, love mercy, walk humbly with God. (Micah 6:8)

## 5. TOO POLITICAL

**Definition-** The Church is overly motivated by a political agenda, promoting and representing politically conservative interests and issues. Christians all vote Republican and are extreme right-wing conservatives.

This is a very delicate issue, especially in Johnson County and in Kansas – Republican Party strongholds.

Pastors often preach politics from the pulpit – even endorsing what candidate the congregation should vote for. (For example, in 2004 Sarah Palin's former pastor told his congregation that he would doubt the salvation of anyone who voted for John Kerry.)

A quick story: A few years back at a ministry I worked for, we had a missionary couple move back from the field to Kansas City to work at the headquarters. About a month later the Missouri Governor election was taking place. At the lunch room one day I heard this couple come in, sit down and say: "Hey, we haven't really looked at the candidates – who should we vote for?"

This is why outsiders have this perception. They see and hear this blind voting for a candidate or party based on what Church leaders say. Classic example – the Moral Majority. Outsiders aren't nearly as opposed to people who make an educated vote based on personal convictions.

### **What does the Bible say?**

Romans 13:1-2 – "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves."

God sets up authorities. We should care and we should submit to the authority they have been given by God for whatever his perfect, sovereign purposes are.

Matthew 22: 17-21 – "Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

Don't forget who your primary allegiance is to. Not the government, but Jesus.

## How do we respond?

- Don't talk about any politicians (especially if they're Christians) like they're infallible. Every elected leader makes mistakes. And every elected leader deserves prayer and support, though not blind support.
- Vote Smart. Remain engaged in politics- it's crucial for influencing culture. Study the Bible and the platforms and issues. Then make the best possible decision based on that. Encourage other Christians to do the same thing – don't encourage them to blindly vote for a certain candidate.
- Convert people to Jesus, not your political agenda. No political party platform has ever been 100% Biblical. And it never will be. The best use of our time is to connect people to Jesus, let the Holy Spirit transform them, and let their transformed heart make an educated decision about who to vote for.
- Let the Church lead change. Help make the Church the primary agent for positive change in the world. Don't wait for a political party to do it.

## 6. JUDGMENTAL

**Definition-** Christians are quick to judge others. They are not honest about their attitudes and perspectives about other people. Christians really don't love people the way they say they should and do.

We have gained the reputation of standing on a pedestal and pointing out why everyone else is wrong and sinful. Whatever truth this may contain is insignificant. People can't hear the truth in love if all they hear is the Church yelling at them for why their wrong.

To be certain, things we see in the world are wrong. But that doesn't automatically give us the right to denounce anyone and everyone in any and every situation simply because we know better.

### What does the Bible say?

Matthew 7:1-3 – “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?”

We must avoid judging others, knowing that we will be judged by the same measure.

1 Corinthians 5:9-12 - I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge

those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you"

Love those outside the Church. Also Love those inside it, but love them by teaching, rebuking, correcting and training them in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16)

### **How do we respond?**

- Love people unconditionally. Look for common ground before looking for faults.
- Judge the right group. Not outsiders, but fellow Christians. But judge only with the measure that you will be judged – the standard of the Bible.
- Listen to people. Don't jump to conclusions and be quick to judge. Instead be quick to listen and slow to speak. Seek to understand people. And if you offer advice, do it out of the right motivation – that they may glorify God.

### **CONCLUSION: WHY ALL THIS MATTERS**

Because of these perceptions, millions of people want nothing to do with the Church or the Gospel it preaches. And, most often, that's not because of the actual message of the Gospel. It's because of the way that message is represented and lived out by the Church.

Without compromising the truth of the Gospel, we must do what we can to live and speak in a way that counters these negative perceptions and shares the genuine, loving message of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection.

**Next Week:** Misperceptions: what our culture (wrongly) thinks about the gospel.

Next week we'll talk about misperceptions the culture has about the church. Whereas this week the perceptions are often (sadly) accurate, there are also many inaccurate things the culture believes about the gospel. We'll look at a few of those and discuss how we can speak to those misperceptions.