

Smoky Mountain Reflections #160

The summer is upon us and as I ponder things to communicate I find myself wondering, ruminating, if you will, about why there are so many words in the evangelical vocabulary that make me cringe a little bit every time I hear them. Please know that I am not saying that these words cannot be used in a context that is perfectly orthodox (right practice) but for the most part, I think they are used in ways that are unorthodox and a misapplication of the Christian faith. Here are some popular evangelical terms I do not like, and explanations for why.

Jesus Follower: There is no shortage of good Biblical passages that clearly teach that we should follow Jesus, however when this term is used it is often used to focus on the Christian instead of Christ, in what I believe is an unhelpful way. Instead of reinventing the wheel I prefer the tried and true, 2000-year-old “Christian” because it is more difficult to misuse such a Christocentric term and it keeps the focus on the one to be followed instead of the follower.

Revitalization: This term has no real Biblical resonance; the closest things to it in the Bible would be to “distill” or “purify”, but these terms are never used in that way. Unfortunately, this term is loaded with a lot of theological and enthusiastic baggage. Most often when this term is applied to the church, it is used to downplay the value of centuries of orthodox practices in favor of newer, trendier, man-centered practices for the sake of “the Gospel”.

Seeker: I feel that this term is a misnomer and should be replaced by what it really means: “a dissatisfied church shopper”, because people who are dead in their trespasses and sins do not seek Christ. But don’t take my word for it; St Paul says in Ephesians 2:5 ...*we were dead in our trespasses*...and in Romans 8:7 we read “*the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God*.” I do not see how we can be “seeker-sensitive” without appealing to the flesh, which not only is not Christ-centered, it is *antithetical* to Christ.

Vision: We are not speaking of seeing with our eyes here, we are speaking instead of a 21st century version of the 5-year business plan. There is nothing wrong with the body of Christ in a community finding out what the real needs of a community are and looking for ways to share the love of Christ through works of mercy and kindness in order to establish relationships and share the Gospel through word and deed. However, this term is often used by modern evangelical Pastors (who sometimes act more like CEOs than Pastors) to give the authority of holy inspiration to their priority list. Pastors are called to serve God’s church, not dictate plans.

Felt needs: Let’s call those what they really are: *wants*. We live in such a narcissistic society that we have come to the point of letting the world set the priorities for the church. When the church starts looking and acting like the dark world...., who is inviting whom into what place? How about *we* help the world see what *they* really need: God’s means of grace; inviting them to come out of the darkness in to the marvelous light, which exposes sin but also washes it away.

Life-changing: Becoming a Christian is clearly a life-changing event, whether it happens when you are 12 days or 12 years old. However, with this term, we again find ourselves falling into a ditch of sorts, focusing on temporal results instead of the eternal reality. Another example of this is the term “**Redemptive power**”, which is often used as a rabbit’s foot that will guarantee a big house, nice car and beautiful spouse. God’s word guarantees only our eternal condition; there are no temporal guarantees. Will those who live a life in accord with God’s precepts have a long prosperous life? That is possible, but we must also acknowledge that the Bible includes a book called *Job*, in which a man living in accord with God’s precepts suffered greatly. We must acknowledge that a man “after God’s own heart” (David) suffered greatly. We must acknowledge that history’s wisest man (Solomon) suffered greatly. Over the past 2000 years, many millions of Christians have also suffered and died, simply because they refused to deny Christ.

Authentic: The problem with this word is that it is often used to determine in a practical fashion whether what someone is doing is God-pleasing. Meaning, “if it moves you spiritually then it must be authentic!” This idea, however, has been known historically as the heresy of *enthusiasm* (the notion that God speaks to us *directly*, through our feelings, rather than His revealed word). The best way to determine true authenticity is to ensure we are communicating God’s truth in accord with His *word*, using the means he

instituted (word & sacrament) to distribute and receive the faith and forgiveness Christ bled and died for. Keeping Christ central is not an easy task, but it is one that **Christians** are called to. We should then use our words carefully in order to communicate the Gospel clearly.

In Christ,
Pastor Portier