

Dealing with Changes in the 21st Century Church

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- *How has Christianity changed?*
- *What's good and bad about the changes?*
- *How should we minister to the church entering the twenty-first century?*

We live in what cultural anthropologists call post-modernism.

Modernism was the concept which came to its peak from the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s. It ignored the spiritualism of the Middle Ages and emphasized reason applied to the natural world. It believed truth was objective and determinable through investigation. This truth would, in turn, solve all our problems in time. In the 1960s all that changed in the general western society, and it impacted the church in the 1970s.

Post-modernism is a return to the spiritual but without objective determinable truth. So everybody's view must be tolerated as okay for them. This doctrine of tolerance has impacted the church as it enters the twenty-first century.

Here are some changes to consider:

The 20th Century Church (before 1980)

1. The average church attendee was a Christian who grew up in that church.
2. Success was connected to morality.
3. The worship service was evaluated traditionally - did it provide order and structure?
4. The focus was on needs defined by the Bible.
5. Evangelism was mostly confrontational.
6. We believed in the supernatural (faith based in reason).
7. Evangelicals were different from the world and determined to stay that way.
8. Evangelicals read and studied, emphasizing exegetical preaching and substance Bible studies.
9. The enemy was the liberal theologian.
10. Church membership was crucial.
11. The local church was the central social event. (If someone was not there, everybody knew about it).
12. The local church governed and judged the social life of its people
13. The church was like a family - its purpose was to minister to its own.
14. They connected sin to sinners - *all have sinned and come short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23).

The 21st Century Church (after 1980)

1. The average church attendee did not grow up in the church they now attend.
2. Success is disconnected from morality.
3. The worship service is evaluated pragmatically - does it provide entertainment and "take-home value"?
4. The focus is on wants defined by ourselves.
5. Evangelism is mostly relational.
6. We believe in the mystical (faith based in faith).
7. Evangelicals attempt to be contemporary with the world, and we are determined to relate to it.
8. Evangelicals are problem-solvers, emphasizing help for things like divorce, remarriage, abuse, and homosexuality.
9. The enemy is the liberal politician.
10. Church membership is optional.
11. The local church is one of many social events. (If someone is not there, do we even notice?)
12. The local church governs and judges little, if any, of the social life of its people.
13. The church is like a business. Its purpose is to grow numerically.
14. We disconnect sin from sinners ("hate the sin, love the sinner")

15. Teen sex was rare.
16. Adolescence lasted about five years.
17. The liberals were ecumenical.
18. Sunday school was dominant and youth groups were peripheral.
19. Elders were successful in their families.
20. They tried to fix the church.
21. To the non-Christian world, the term "born again" meant sincere.
22. The emphasis was on repentance.
23. Relationships followed doctrine. (You tended to go where people believed what you did.)
24. Prophecy was crucial.
25. Discipline was part of the local church.
26. Accountability was part of the evangelical social structure.
27. Problems were seen as basically spiritual.
28. God's will comes from the Bible.
29. Most church members could state and defend their church's doctrinal stand.
30. The emphasis was on truth.
31. Everybody knew *for God so loved the world ...* (John 3:16)
32. Children learned from adults

15. Teen sex is common.
16. Adolescence lasts 10 to 15 years.
17. The conservatives are ecumenical.
18. Sunday schools are peripheral and youth groups are dominant.
19. Elders are successful in their occupations.
20. They try to fix the country.
21. To the non-Christian world, the term "born again" means mystical (or weird).
22. The emphasis is on forgiveness.
23. Doctrine follows relationships. (You tend to believe what people believe where you go.)
24. Prophecy is optional.
25. Discipline is impossible in the local church.
26. Accountability must be sought out apart from the social structures.
27. Problems are seen as basically psychological or genetic.
28. God's will comes from circumstances.
29. Most church members could not state, let alone defend, their church's doctrinal stand.
30. The emphasis is on tolerance.
31. Everybody knows *judge not that you be not judged*.
32. Children learn from each other.

Questions and Answers

Q: *How has Christianity changed?*

A: The list in this brochure can be summarized by the word "tolerance." Tolerance has caused us to separate: the sin from the sinner, wants from needs, ministry from theology, children from adults, and the family from church.

Q: *What's good and bad about the changes?*

A: As we enter the twenty-first century, the church is more focused on outreach, and that's good (Luke 15:1-10; 1 Corinthians 9:27). It's also less legalistic and more sensitive to people (Matthew 23). We are better at listening to people before we speak. But we listen less to God in His Word (1 Timothy 2:15). While focusing on seekers and Christian's needs, we have neglected the potentially mature (Hebrews 5:11-14) and focused on building our mega-meetings.

Q: *How should we minister to the church entering the twenty-first century?*

A: Discipleship is the key, not just to disciple the new believer but to generate disciple-makers (Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Timothy 2:2).