

Staying Relevant

Religion is man's attempt to reach God. Love is God's attempt to reach man. What does this mean? Today, we are talking about staying relevant.

Introduction

I once again came across a great quote from the Jewish Theologian Abraham Herschel that leads into today's teaching. It says:

"When faith is replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit; ...when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain... when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion—its message becomes meaningless"

He says so much in that one quote. It always encourages me when I come across this quote. We wanted to share it with you and expound on it a bit and back it up with scripture.

Many Voices Today

There are a lot of voices out there in the world today. There are a lot of places to hear someone's opinion. When you include social media like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter and the relative anonymity that they bring, you get even more opinions and hatred. But what feeds that?

Human nature feeds that. Human nature is that sinful nature that we are all born into. The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 3:23, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." That sinful nature is in us and fights against us when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

It is that sinful nature that takes something like faith and, over time, turns it to creed; takes worship and, over time, turns it to discipline; that takes love and, over time turns it into habit.

The sinful nature starts to win when we take our focus off Jesus and start to focus on other things. We start to take God's love, expressed through His Son, and turn it into a set of rules and disciplines to reach him.

He has not asked us to create these rules and disciplines nor has He instructed us to create and document these doctrines. God has merely asked us to respect him, love him, and obey his commandments. Matthew 22:36-40 says:

Matthew 22:36-40

(36) "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" (37) Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' (38) This is the first and greatest commandment. (39) And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (40) All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Friends, we do not need to build ourselves a way to reach God. God has already reached down from Heaven to us through his Son, Jesus Christ. God has already created the path for us to be with him, to talk with him, to sing and dance for him.

That is love. Staying relevant means keeping our focus on Jesus and loving God.



Short Attention Spans

People have short attention spans. We like things the way we like them and we like to be comfortable. Many people have a hard time with things changing and have a hard time with things not being held to a defined set of rules. We can also become somewhat lazy over time and start to rely on our own devices instead of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

We see this in the church all around the world. We see a church that appears to be succeeding and appears to be growing. Instead of doing what God has called us to do, we try to do what the other group is doing. We have taken our eyes off Jesus and put them on another group, sometimes in the name of staying relevant.

We lose sight of Jesus and we lose sight of God's love and start to do things under our own power and wisdom. We will fail and we will fall and we will not be relevant.

Whenever faith, love, and worship are replaced with doctrine, habit, and discipline we have lost sight of Jesus and God's plan for our own personal lives and for the Church he has made us a part of. That disconnection from God causes us to stop hearing God and knowing what the Holy Spirit is leading us to say and do.

That is when we think God is no longer hearing or answering our prayers. It is because we have built a barrier between us and him. This makes our message meaningless and we are no longer staying relevant.

Faith and Religion

The other thing Rabbi Herschel warns us of is our faith becoming an heirloom and our religion being used only for authority.

Christianity is different than every other religious system or faith in the world. Christianity is the only faith where the Creator reaches out to the creation. It is the only religion where God gave up his own Son to pursue man, instead of asking for a sacrifice for man to follow him.

You cannot inherit Christianity. You are not a Christian because your father or mother is. You cannot be a Christian because of the city or nation you come from. You can only be a Christian by personally saying yes to Jesus, acknowledging you are a sinner in need of a savior, and asking Jesus to forgive you and be that savior and Lord over your life.

John 14:6 says:

John 14:6

(6) Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

To stay relevant, we must acknowledge that we each, individually, must choose to follow Jesus and not use that faith to control people or manipulate them.



Many religions of the world control people through fear and intimidation. Some in the church even use scripture to control and intimidate people. This is wrong and not in keeping with the love of God through Jesus Christ.

We must have compassion to stay relevant. As we said earlier, Jesus tells us that the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. That is not always easy to do. Sometimes it is very difficult, especially if they do not know Jesus and live a very worldly life.

Even more so, we must love fellow believers with compassion, knowing that none of us is perfect. John 13:34-35 says:

John 13:34-35

(34) "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. (35) By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

When we love one another, and have compassion for one another, everyone will know we are Christians. Everyone will know we are sons and daughters of the Lord, the Living God, the King Most High.

Conclusion

Sharing and showing the love of God is how we stay relevant in the world today. The apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 and 13:

1 Corinthians 13:1-3;13

(1) If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. (2) If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. (3) If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

(13) And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

We must keep our focus on Jesus not each other, we love each other as Christ loves each one of us, and we love and forgive the world just as Jesus loves and forgives the world, without condition.

Church, do not use your faith or the Word of God as an offensive weapon against any person. The only one the Bible is to be used as a weapon against is the devil and his demons.

We urge you, brothers and sisters, to continue to love one another and others in your circle of influence and keep God's message from being meaningless. Stay relevant by keeping your focus on Jesus, allowing the Holy Spirit to equip you, and allowing the love of God to flow through you as you minister to others, in Jesus' name.

