How Will They Know?

Reflection by Paddy McCoy, Walla Walla, WA

In Dave Kinnaman and Gabe Lyon’s book published in 2007, unChristian, 91% of those who identified as non-Christians between the ages of 16-29 said that the first identifier of Christians in today’s culture is that they are anti-gay. In fact, you have to get through a list of five things before anything positive is said about Christians; anti-gay, hypocritical, judgmental, irrelevant, and too political.

This week at a conference in Boston, MA, a researcher by the name of Dee Allsop, CEO of Heart+Mind Ministries, referenced some ‘yet to be released’ research that shows a majority of Americans feel that Christians are the problem, not the solution, to most of the issues we face in North America. In addition, 49% feel that the world would continue receiving aid and having strong social justice proponents even if the Christians weren’t a part of the equation, and that number is on the rise even though other statistics show that most of the good work being done in the world is at the hands of faith-based organizations.

Does anyone else see a problem here or do we want to bury our heads in the sand and just hope these perceptions change?

Former presidential speech-writer, Michael Gershon, said that “if evangelical Christians are going to be known for their ethical agenda over and above the story of the gospel, they are finished.” I believe this applies to all Christians, not just those identifying as evangelical.
Why is it we seem to care more that people know what we believe on any particular issue as opposed to caring that other people know we care for them?

A driving passage in Scripture for me for the last three years comes from a statement that Jesus made in the passage of John known by some as His last will and testament. You see, Jesus knew He was hours away from the cross, and when you know you are dying you cut to the chase and say the things that matter most. Even Jesus' disciples notice a change in His talk because, “Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God.” (John 16:29-30, ESV)

As a part of these words, Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13: 34-35, ESV)

Now, Jesus said that we are to love one another as He loved us, and how much did Jesus love us? He said “no greater love has anyone than this, that He lay His life down for His friends.” (John 15: 13, ESV) But Jesus did better than that, didn’t He? For “while we were still sinners (enemies with God) Christ died for the ungodly…God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5: 6, 8, ESV)

So what?

So it seems to be that an appropriate and bright future for our church could be wrapped up in the words of John 13:34-35, or in the lyrics of a hymn written in 1968 by Peter Scholtes in the height of the civil rights movement, “And they’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love. Yes, they’ll know we are Christians by our love.”

What does this mean in a practical sense? It means that as we move forward in this time in history, I hope to be a part of the movement that reverses the current trend in North America concerning Christians. I hope we can go out of our way to love with even a smidgen of the kind of wild and reckless and amazing grace-oriented love that our Savior shows us. That we could take a warm loaf of bread to those on the fringe of our society and seek to build a relationship with them even though we may disagree with them on some issues. That we could show the younger generation what it means to love one another, listen to one another, and respect one another even when we disagree with one another. That we could move away from our city on a hill and retreat mentalities, and move into our cities and communities to work together with those from different beliefs and different backgrounds to help our hurting communities thrive. That we could look forward to the hope of the second coming of Jesus all the while not forgetting that this is our Father’s world and He needs us to care for it and the people who live in it until He comes.

Brothers and sisters, the time has come for us to be known by our love, yes, our love, can we please be known by our love?

Now certainly, love does not mean acceptance of everything a person does, but it DOES mean knowing that we love them first, connecting them to Jesus, and then letting Jesus through His Holy Spirit do His work in them (John 14: 26…He will teach us, John 16: 7-11…He will convict us). If we are strongly convicted that a person is doing something that harms their heart and their future and their relationships with others, we can communicate that conviction via grace and truth but only IN RELATIONSHIP and giving time for the Holy
Spirit to do His work first.

As Ellen White said, “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, “Follow Me.”” (MH, 143.3) In this context Jesus invited people to follow AFTER a relationship was established.

So my vision for the body of Christ is that we would go forward in love, under the banner of grace and truth and in the name of Jesus Christ, to Love Well. That we would build meaningful relationships with our neighbors and community, even those who are different than us and who disagree with us. Then maybe, just maybe, with the leading of the Holy Spirit and apt time listening to God’s Word, we’ll turn the world upside down and on its knees for the kingdom of God. Amen and amen!

Recalibrate

1. Why do you think a majority of people today see Christians as the problem, not the solution to the problems we face today?
2. What commitment could you make today, to do your part in letting all people everywhere know you are a Christian by your love, yes your love?

Feel free to send any thoughts or comments to Paddy McCoy.