

Church History - the Early Church Part 2 (100-312)

by David Guzik

David Guzik explores the beliefs and teachings of the early church, emphasizing the importance of early church fathers and the formation of foundational doctrines.

Duration: 40:04

Scripture: Matthew 28:19, 1 Corinthians 9:22

Topics: "Early Church", "Apostolic Creed"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by reciting the Apostle's Creed, emphasizing the importance of believing in the one true God and Jesus Christ as His only Son. The speaker highlights the significance of Jesus being conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, as well as His suffering under Pontius Pilate and crucifixion. The speaker also discusses the importance of staying true to the message of the Bible and the challenges of relating to people in their daily lives without compromising the Gospel. The sermon concludes with a reminder that the work of God is never far from ruin, but the spread of the Gospel continues globally.

Transcript

Last time we were together we talked about how Christians met, how Christians worshipped together. We talked about the spread of the gospel. We talked about persecution and that whole phenomenon of persecution.

Now, we're going to talk about what Christians believed during the time of the early church. And this is an important question, might I say a charged question. What I mean by charged is there's a lot riding on the outcome of this.

There are not many movements that come into Christianity that say, well, who cares about what the apostles believed, we've got something better. Believe it or not, there have been some guys who've come, even today. If you're aware of some of the faith movement teachings and the health and wealth gospel, some of them, and at least you admire their honesty, they say, we know that what we're teaching is in accord with the Apostle Paul.

And they say, we're better than him. We're further along than Paul was. Which, you know, to us would just be, we'd be amazed that anybody would say such a thing.

But the idea is we want to get back to what the early church taught. Now, there's an interesting question here because what we have is we have the apostolic church and then we have the early church. For the purposes of our discussion, we don't mean the same thing by this.

The apostolic church is the church of the New Testament. That's the church that we find described in the New Testament. Now, is the church of the New Testament a model for us? Is it an example for us, for us to follow in their footsteps? So we should be like the Corinthians with their division.

So we're not to emulate the early church in every aspect. Or I should say the apostolic church in every aspect. But where they went wrong, we can learn from it.

We have an authoritative, from God, inspired history of the apostolic church contained both in the letters of the New Testament and especially in the book of Acts. So when we're talking about the apostolic church, that's one thing. This is the church of the apostles.

Then you have the period of the early church, which is what we're talking about here, from the year 100 to say, what did we say? Did we say 312 or 313? How long did it take for the church to start going wrong in its doctrine? Did the church start going wrong in its doctrine in the apostolic days? Take a look at the first chapters of like the book of Galatians. And you have Paul writing to the Galatians saying, I am shocked that you have so soon departed from the Gospel. And it's amazing.

Paul is amazed that there's been so soon a departure from the true Gospel in Galatia. So what I'm just trying to say is, if there was a departure from the true Gospel, at least in some places. By the way, you read the seven letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation? How many of them are right on? A couple of them out of the seven are really right on.

Some of them are a mixed bag. And a couple of them are just terrible. So if there were problems in the apostolic church, how much more might we expect that there were doctrinal and church life problems in the early church? This is just what I'm trying to say.

Yes, it's important for us to know, it's important for us to understand what the early church believed, but we can't receive it uncritically. We can't say, hey, these people were the closest to the source, so they must have had it right. Not necessarily.

And we'll see some of the points along the way where that not necessarily makes a big difference. Now, what did Christians believe during the time of the early church? And again, we're talking about the early church. I'm just letting you guys know.

We're making this distinction between the apostolic church and the early church. They don't mean the same thing. We're talking about the church after the apostles.

If you want to put it in the figure of a human life, this is the infant stage. This is the baby or the toddler stage of the church. So there's a difference.

So, what did Christians believe during this time of the early church? Well, first of all, they believed what the early church fathers taught them. Who are the early church fathers? Not the apostles. They're in a

different category altogether.

These are the men who took over from the apostles the generation of leadership and teaching in the church after the apostles. So, of course, their life spans coincided somewhat with the apostles. But they did their major ministry, their major influence in the generation after the apostles.

They're known as the early church fathers. Now, again, here are some of the notable early church fathers. Clement of Rome.

Another one, Ignatius of Antioch. Hermas of Rome. Now, again, all of these guys are in the period, let's say, anywhere as early as... I'm talking about doing their ministry.

Maybe in the 90s to the 150s. Okay? This is this essential first generation after the apostles. Jesus ascends into heaven, right? And he entrusts his work to 120 followers.

Not 12, right? There are more followers of Jesus than that. But pretty much it's 120 people. That's what the book of Acts tells us.

That's how many were assembled together on the day of Pentecost there with the Lord. So, he entrusts his work to 120 people. What if they fell away? I mean, church is gone.

But then it happens again. You have the generation of the apostles. They pass it on to the next generation.

The generation of the early church fathers. Hey, you know, what if these guys drop the ball? I mean, you can see how the work of God is never more than one generation away from ruin. Now, right now you could say that of the church.

Yes and no. Because you know what? Now, the church is so broadly spread over all the world. I tell you that if the church of Jesus Christ would become dead to God in the United States of America next year, okay, just if you would obliterate it.

You know what? The work of the gospel would be going on strongly all over the world. Because the church is actually, you know, I mean, we get very limited. We tend to think that our American experience of Christianity, that that's it.

But you know what? It's so much broader than that all over the world. When we think and wonder, well, you know, Lord, it's just, you know, the work of the gospel, it's going okay here, you know, but it's really not. In other places in the world, the gospel is spreading under the most amazing revival conditions right now that you can imagine.

Places like India, places like Latin America, certain parts of Africa, the gospel is just exploding in its influence and its power. Yeah, isn't that beautiful? So you know what? The church is broad enough now to where even if this generation of American Christians were to drop the ball, which they could, or the next generation, or whatever, you know what? The church is broad enough to where it would survive that, but it would be tragic, wouldn't it? In any regard, so you have this passed on to the early church fathers, Clement, Ignatius, Hermas, Barnabas was another fellow, and then a notable fellow known as Polycarp. Now, a lot of these people, a lot of these people had their influence because they were associates or disciples of the apostles themselves.

For example, Polycarp was well known as a disciple of the apostle John. And so he was like the inheritor of John's ministry, of John's message, of John's heart. And so this carried on through the centuries, and you see that they were just kind of blessed and put forth by the apostles, the early church fathers.

Now, what did they believe in the early church? They believed what the early church fathers taught them. Now, the reason why I'm saying this is what's important about this is that you cannot separate people from doctrine. Doctrine is made alive and doctrine has a voice through people.

Now, I'm not trying to say that it doesn't exist in books. Of course it exists in books. But it's people that give it voice.

And these were the people that gave the true gospel voice in this generation after the apostles. So, what's next here? What else did early Christians believe? They believed creeds, especially the Apostles' Creed. Now, the Apostles' Creed is so called because, well, some early church traditions say that the apostles wrote it.

And I think you can construct it, you can lay it out to where there's 12 different lines to it. And they used to say that, you know, one apostle suggested each line and this and that. No, you know, the apostles did not write the Apostles' Creed.

But it does give a succinct statement of basic apostolic doctrine. And that's why they call it the Apostles' Creed. We don't know exactly when this creed was formulated.

But we do know that in the year 215 AD, a guy in Rome named Hippolytus was using this creed to confirm people in baptism. They would use it to train new converts in the basics of doctrine. And then when people were going to be baptized, they would ask them questions based upon this creed.

They would say, do you believe this? And they would have to respond that they believed in a certain way. And as time went on in the early church, this creed was a handy way for people to remember the most important doctrines of the early church when it was difficult for everybody to have a Bible to read on their own. Here it is.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and buried. He descended into hell the third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

From whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Now, what's interesting is that there's a lot that's not in that creed. Can anybody tell me how that creed tells you how a person is saved? Is there anything in there telling you about the nature of Jesus Christ? That Jesus Christ is God? There's a lot of things that we might say this creed doesn't really talk about. But yet, here it is.

This was an early important statement of what Christianity was all about. Just take a look at it real quick. I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

Now, this was an important thing because remember the context of the world that they lived in that day. There were a lot of gods that people could live, could worship, could give themselves to, right? This was a way of saying I'm not going out for any of those other gods. I believe in the God of the Bible.

In the God of Judaism, basically, is what it was saying. And in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord, his only son is an important thing because that speaks of the unique sonship of Jesus Christ. Not just in the sense that all people can be said to be the offspring of God.

Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, right? That's an important doctrinal point. Suffered under Pontius Pilate. Isn't that interesting? It's so fascinating.

You know, this creed has been repeated, literally, billions of times through the centuries by Christians. Any of you ever been to a church where they say this every week? Yeah, it's not a bad thing. You know, unless it just becomes an empty ritual, which I guess it is.

What's so ironic about this is remember Pilate at the trial of Jesus trying to wash his hands of the responsibility of giving Jesus over to be crucified. He would be horrified to know that in the most classic creed of Christianity, his name is forever attached to the death of Jesus Christ. That washing of the hands didn't do much good, did it? Anyway, suffered under Pontius Pilate.

Now, let me say one other thing. What else is important about this is that to say suffered under Pontius Pilate makes sure everybody knows that this is a concrete historical event. This isn't fairytale land.

This isn't legend. There was a real man named Pontius Pilate and Jesus Christ who walked this earth was just as real as this man, Pontius Pilate. I mean, there's no doubt about this.

This is historical fact. Was crucified, died and buried. He descended into hell.

Interesting that they talk about that. Because this is one of the sketchier portions, biblically, of the ministry of Jesus Christ. But it's included in the creed.

The third day he rose from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. You know, that's an important aspect of the work of Jesus Christ that we often don't consider.

Ascension into heaven and his enthronement sitting next to God the Father Almighty. One of the reasons why that's important is that it speaks very powerfully of the finished work of Jesus Christ. It means that that work was finished and he could sit down.

Then it says, from whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead. I mean, that speaks of the second coming. So, you know, the more you look at this creed you go, yeah, yeah.

Even though it leaves some things out that we might say should be in there, at the same time it does communicate other things very well and very powerfully. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church. I'm a Catholic.

Anybody in here Catholic? Let me tell you, if you're not Catholic, you're not saved. You know what Catholic means? The word Catholic means universal. And you know what that means? That means the Catholic Church means the universal Church.

The Church that's all over the world. The Church that is Jesus Christ Church irrespective of language or country or culture or anything else. That is the whole Church.

I believe in the whole Church. Now, what's interesting is it's almost a contradiction in terms to say the Roman Universal Church. Isn't that almost a contradiction? It's almost like saying the Simi Valley Universal Church.

Well, no, if it's universal it shouldn't be fixed to one city. It's either the Catholic Church or it's the Roman Church. But it's funny how we get this term the Roman Catholic Church.

Because in a sense, the term's contradictory. It's oxymoron, if you're familiar with that phrase, to say Roman Catholic. So there should be everybody here that says I believe in the Holy Catholic Church if you understand what Catholic means.

It means universal. By the way, that's why whenever I speak, and I can't say I do this perfectly, but my preference is to never say the Catholic Church, the Catholic Church. I like to say the Roman Catholic Church.

Because I believe in the Catholic Church. I am a member of the Catholic Church, but not of the Roman Catholic Church. Of course, I could do, you could refer to it as the Protestants of old used to.

They didn't say the Catholic Church. They didn't say the Roman Church. They used to call it the Papal Church.

And Roman Catholics weren't called Roman Catholics. They were called Papists. It would be interesting if you could bring those terminologies back, but nobody can relate to those terms today.

But that's how they used to refer to it. The Holy Catholic Church, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

So you can see how this is a good, solid, basic, creedual statement. That Christians made very dear to their hearts. And basically, when it came time, you know, somebody was a new believer, and they wanted to be educated in the faith, they would use this creed to teach them.

And then when it was time for that person to be baptized, the pastor, before baptizing them, might quiz them and say, now, do you believe in God? And they would be expected to say, I believe in God the Father, maker of heaven and earth. Do you believe in Jesus Christ? And they would say, I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. And then go on and repeat the terms of the statement.

And memorizing this would be something essential. Now, you could see how this would be all the more important in an age where people couldn't have their own Bibles. It wasn't like you couldn't get a Bible.

It wasn't that it was impossible. It was just that they were so expensive because they were more rare, because it was a lot of labor to do that. Although we must say that society at this time was far more literate than it would be a thousand years from this time.

If you take the year 250 and the year 1250, the Scriptures are far more dispersed in the year 250, even given Roman persecution, than they are in the year 1250, when all of Europe is supposedly Christian. But that's for another time when we talk about that. Alright, so what did the early church believe? Well, they believed what the early church fathers taught.

They believed the Apostles' Creed. Number three, they believed the New Testament. How did we get the New Testament? Alright, Paul writes a letter to the Colossians, right? You're from Colossians.

You get this letter. You read it in the church. Wow.

This speaks to exactly where we're at. This is good. This is great.

Another guy is in the city of Philippi. And he says, Man, can we read the letter Paul wrote to you? And he'd say, Hey man, that's our letter. That's not your letter.

You can read it, but don't think it's to you. Right? He wrote that to us. Don't go reading my mail.

But you know, when Paul was writing 1 Corinthians, he was writing that to the Corinthians. He wasn't writing it to the Romans. He was writing it to the Corinthians.

How did these letters come together in the Gospels and this and that? Who's going to bring it together? Right? You've got this letter over here, this letter over here, and they're circulating among the churches, but it's going to take a while, maybe a couple generations, until people have the collections put together. Okay? So let's say you're in this process of putting together the collections, right? And you read this book by Max Lucado or by Tim LaHaye, you know, Left Behind or something like that. All right? And man, this book blesses your life.

Right? Oh man, this man, this book spoke to you so much, this Max Lucado book. It's like, oh man, this is great. And so you get this collection of scrolls from one church, and you know, there's this list, and you know what? You throw that Max Lucado book in there and you send it on to the next one.

So does Max Lucado go in the New Testament? Why or why not? You see, these are difficult questions. Now, before the year 140, we don't have any list of what the books of the New Testament are. But yet the Gospels and the letters of the Apostles were respected and authoritative.

We know this. Why? Because they're quoted in the writings of the early church fathers. Remember all those guys I wrote on the board? The early church fathers, Clement, Polycarp, these other guys, they say, just like Paul wrote when he said, and you can find quotations from every book of the New Testament in the writings of the early church fathers.

Matter of fact, if you were to wipe out the New Testament, you could reconstruct, like I've heard estimates, up to 90 or 95% of the New Testament just from quotations from the early church fathers. So you have this dynamic here. We know that these books were recognized as authoritative because of the early church fathers.

So this is the testimony up to the year 140. Now, from 140 to 220, you start having this idea of, we've got to get a list of what books are in and what books are out. You know what prompted this? That's one of the things that's so cool to understand in the course of church history.

You know what prompted the idea that we have to get this list of what books are in and what books are out? Heresy. It's because of problems that come up in the church that they say, we have to have a response to this. Now again, this is a principle that you really need to get down into your mind.

So much of the development of the church, theologically or whatever, comes in response to problems. That pattern has repeated time and time again through the history of the church. Something arises,

something develops, because there's a challenge to it.

It's almost like the church doesn't get serious about it or doesn't carefully consider it until it's threatened. Then when it's threatened, you say, hey, wait a minute, we've got to take a look at this. We've got to figure out what books are in, what books are out.

A threat comes, and the church has to respond to the threat. I don't know about you, but for a lot of people, I say, in part, this is it for me. Well, maybe some, but I've seen it even more so in the lives of other people.

People really start digging into God's Word when a Jehovah's Witness comes and knocks on their door and says, well, you know, da-da-da-da-da-da. And you say, wow, you know, what about that? I've got to dig into God's Word. And all of a sudden, man, they're, oh, every book they can find, this and that, and they're studying, and this and that.

Well, what's done it? There's come a challenge to their faith, and they say, I'd better get down and find an answer to this and find out what's true and what's not. This dynamic happened in the church over and over again, and this is one of the great places where you find it, is in this whole thing of coming up with what books belong in the New Testament. From this year 140 to 220, there started to circulate lists.

These books belong, these books do not. And one of them is a very important one known as the Muratorian Canon. That's because it's named after the guy who discovered it, Moratus, or whatever his name was.

This fellow discovered this book, this list, the Muratorian Canon, and this is a document that lists the books of the Bible. This guy says, this is what belongs, this doesn't. And it is pretty much the same as our own, but what's interesting is he goes in there and he says, now these books are fine for your personal devotions, these other books, he's saying, but they shouldn't be read publicly as scripture.

So there's this division made between, hey, this is a good book, this is great, but it's not on the level of inspired scripture. And so people are starting to think and make those kind of divisions, and it's being very effective in this time. And so there's these other books that come in like The Wisdom of Solomon, The Shepherd of Hermas, The Apocalypse of Peter, you know, these other books, and what do you do with these? Well, they put these into the bin of saying, hey, these may be good books, but they don't belong in our New Testament.

And so from the years 220 to about 400, there finally arose this general agreement throughout the whole church of what belongs in the New Testament and what doesn't. And there were basically three criteria chosen. The first criteria was the book has to have an apostolic author or the author of the book had to be under direct apostolic influence.

So you see that there had to be this idea of the author either had to be an apostle or someone under the direct mentorship of an apostle, that you could say in a sense that it came from that apostle. The second agreement was the book had to have an inherent character and worthiness. In other words, the book had to stand on its own as being something valuable from the Lord.

I mean, you had to look at it and say, you know what, this rings true. You know, you read the Bible and it just rings true. You read other things and it's like, huh? You know, that's not... How many of you read the Book of Mormon and read the Bible? Now, a lot of the Book of Mormon you would say right on to.

You know why? Because in extensive passages it quotes right from the Bible. But in places where it doesn't, you just kind of go on, huh? You know, this just doesn't seem right. And that's how it was.

I mean, the Bible has just a note of inherent authenticity to it. Any of you ever hear of something called the Gospel of Thomas? The Gospel of Thomas was a document discovered in Egypt some 30, 40 years ago. And it purports to be another gospel, a fifth gospel.

And there are some people who say, the Gospel of Thomas belongs in our Bibles. I mean, here are sayings attributed to Jesus and Thomas was a disciple and, you know, all this. You know, all you've got to do is read the Gospel of Thomas.

And there are sections you read and you go, huh? It's just nonsensical. It just doesn't make any sense. It's just like, what? What are you talking about? It's all this weird esoteric, you know, if you jump off a building, you may not land.

Then the third thing that they had to have, first, apostolic authorship or direct influence. Second, inherent character and worthiness. Third, general agreement among Christians.

You know what? If it's of the Lord, Christians generally are going to agree on it. And that's how the early church determined and came up with these lists of what books belong and what books don't. Now, there's something very interesting that relates to the whole Roman Catholic thing, the whole papal thing here, if you will.

Roman Catholics say that the teaching of the church, the church tradition, is equal to the Bible. Do you know their main basis for saying that? Because they say the church gave us the Bible. It was church tradition that gave us the Bible.

So it has to have equal authority to the Bible. So how do you answer that? Well, the bottom line is this. Church tradition didn't recognize, didn't give us the Bible.

It just recognized what God had given. And that's what God gave us in the New Testament. Church tradition did not create the New Testament.

It simply recognized it. It recognized the gift that God had given. Okay.

Let's talk about something else. You've got these three ways that the early Christians, you know, learned what they believed, but there was also the big job of defending what you believed in the early church. And this was the work of the early church apologists.

Now, you guys know what it is to apologize, right? Well, that's not what an apologist is. An apologist comes from the Greek word apology, which means to proclaim a defense. And that's exactly what these men did.

And just so that you should know, that this was an important movement in the early church of early Christians, such as Aristides, Justin Martyr, and Tatian, who came forward and gave these great defenses of the Christian faith. I mean, the Christian faith was being attacked doctrinally, but it was also being attacked politically, right? And these guys wrote trying to convince the emperor of Rome, or trying to convince other people that Christianity was a good, pure, safe religion, and that they didn't have anything to fear from it. And they tried very hard.

They tried to convince people that Christianity was both true, and that it was, if you want to call it, a safe religion. That they didn't have anything to fear from it. You know, Christians were being criticized as being a threat to the social order.

And the apologists came, Hey, listen, we're the best citizens the empire ever had. You know, if you would just leave us alone and let us follow Jesus Christ. Now, there came about a great danger in the work of the apologists.

Because one of the things that the apologists wanted to show was that Christianity was not a novelty. In other words, that Christianity had a history behind it. This isn't something brand new.

This isn't something just new and surprising. This is something that has a history behind it. And how they determined that was they said, Well, first of all, look at the Old Testament.

Right? This is a faith that comes out of the Old Testament. Secondly, they tried to prove that it wasn't a novelty by connecting it with Greek philosophies. Especially the work of a guy named Plato.

Not Plato. Plato. Now, Plato was a Greek philosopher that a lot of people called a Christian before the time of Christ.

Because a lot of his ethical teachings, a lot of his moral teachings, a lot of his theological teachings are compatible with Christianity. Now, what's the danger in this? What are you doing when you start using Plato as a way to show that Christianity is true? Are you Christianizing Plato? Or are you Platonizing Christianity? And actually, a lot of influence from Greek philosophy, from Greek thinking, from Greek ways of ordering things came into Christianity in a lot of times not very good ways. Because they tried to speak to people in the terms of their culture.

Oh, this is something that Christians struggle with. Isn't this a big struggle for Christianity? It really is. How do you speak to the culture? Do you speak to the culture in the culture's terms? Or, do you stand outside of the culture and speak to it just in Biblical terms and expect the culture to get on? Now, what's the problems on either one? Well, what's the problem of speaking to the culture in the terminology or in the thinking of the culture? What's the problem with that? Yeah, you approve of the thinking of the culture.

Yeah, you say that the thinking of the culture is fine. Can I give you a classic example of this? A modern guy today, Robert Shuler. Okay? Now, Robert Shuler is a guy... Let me tell you something.

I believe that Robert Shuler wants to win people to Jesus Christ. I really believe that. He sees himself first and foremost as an evangelist and he says, I want to win people to Jesus Christ.

But Robert Shuler looks at our culture and he says, you know what? People don't care about right and wrong before God anymore. You can't come to people and say, you're a guilty sinner and you need forgiveness in Jesus Christ. Who relates to that? You know what people care about today? They care about self-esteem.

Now, is that true? Is it true that people care a lot more about self-esteem than they care about being a guilty or a not guilty sinner before God? Of course. So he says, we have to speak to our culture. And so Jesus becomes, not the one who saves you from your sin.

That's not important. Our culture can't relate to that. What Jesus becomes is the guy who helps you with your self-esteem problem.

Now, you know what? This is the thing. There's an aspect of truth to this. I mean, a lot of people have horrible, warped self-esteem problems and believe me, the gospel of Jesus Christ has something to say to that.

But friends, nobody, nobody can rightly say that this is the gospel Paul preached. This is a million miles away from it. Now, the similar kind of thing was going on with the work of the apologists.

They were trying to make their message relevant to the culture. Connecting it with the culture. But then all of a sudden it gets tangled up with the culture.

Now, take the other end of it. Say, no, no, no. We're not going to interact with the culture.

No way. What's the problem with that? You're not connecting with anybody. You say, well, that's okay.

Just let them go to hell. We'll, you know, we'll proclaim our message. You see, man, that doesn't seem to be the heart of God either.

You know, you can say, listen, Jesus Christ cares about culture. He came and he came and his culture and all this. And what do you do about that? You know, this is a real problem for the churches.

You know, just this week they're having down in Anaheim the Harvest Crusade. Something that Calvary Chapel puts on. The ministry of Greg Laurie.

And, you know, to me I think that that's probably the best way to address this very difficult, thorny problem. It is obviously trying to connect with the culture. There's no doubt about that.

The music, the atmosphere, the setting, it's trying to be a place where people from this culture can come and feel a connection. There's no doubt about that. The use of media, the way the advertising is, it's all trying to connect something with the culture.

But the message is clear and unmistakably a biblical message. Now, there's a lot of people who say that's what they're going to do. Oh yeah, we'll just communicate in a cultural way.

But it's the same message. A lot of people say they're going to do that. But, you know, I've got to say, not many people do.

Honestly speaking, they don't. Well, Paul knew this difficulty himself. He said, to the Jews, we've got a stumbling block.

To the Greeks, we're foolish. You know, I mean, Paul recognized that his own gospel in his day had places where it didn't connect culturally. So, Paul knew this line.

He said on the one hand, listen, I'll become all things to all men that I might by some means win a few. That's not the issue. Paul would say, there's certain things that, man, I don't care.

We'll do whatever we need to do as long as we can connect with these people. But there were other places where Paul would say, I will not change this no matter what. And I think what's hard is to know how to do those things well.

Again, there's a lot of people who say, okay, we'll use this cultural form, but we'll keep the message the same. Oh, it'll still be the message. But, you know, again, you look at their message and there is no message.

There isn't. If I can use an example that I hope isn't offensive to people, and I'll just throw this out, take a look at someone like the artist Amy Grant. When she began in her career, there was a very, very definite biblical message there.

There's no doubt about it. Take a look at her career. As she started to become popular in the secular world, popular in the world at large, you see the clarity of her message diminishing to where now what a lot of people would say about her music is that, well, it doesn't contradict the Bible, but does it proclaim it? No, it doesn't proclaim it either, but it may not contradict it.

Where you look at her early stuff, and it evidently, very vocally, proclaimed it. You can see the definite shift. And you have to say that there has been a definite shift there.

Well, a lot of churches, and they were faced with the same issue here. You've got culture and you've got the message. How do you speak to the culture without compromising the message? Everybody knows that that's what you're supposed to do.

Everybody does! But it's still hard to do it well. And this isn't a difficult thing for people to know conceptually. The whole church knows it conceptually.

And everybody is out there saying that that's what they're trying to do. Here you have the whole phenomenon in our culture of the seeker-sensitive church. Now, the idea behind a seeker-sensitive church is that you gear the church service towards the culture of the unbeliever.

The culture of the unbeliever says, I do not want to sit around for 35 minutes and listen to a guy talk. I'll take 20 minutes to talk. And I want to laugh.

I want to be moved. I want to do that. That's what I want from a speaker.

And so you engineer the message. You know, the seeker-sensitive says, you know what? Real worship makes me uncomfortable. So we're not going to care about real worship.

We're going to make it just an entertainment. And we don't care if people sing or if people do that. That's not the job.

It's just to be entertained. And so you have this whole seeker-sensitive dynamic. Now, the idea here is that this is what you do.

That you get these people who are seekers and you put them among them and you make them Christians. And you do this by gearing the service to the seekers. You gear the service to the seekers and you make them like Christians.

I'll tell you what time will prove out, and I think it has been proven in some ways, that actually what happens is you take the Christians and you make them more like seekers than you do make them more like Christians. At least in some ways. Alright, Lord, we thank you for our time together here this morning.

And we ask that you put a blessing on us as we go our way this day. And Father, show us how in our daily lives we can relate to people where they're at. Just like Paul said, he had become all things to all men that he would by some means win a few.

Lord, without ever compromising your message. It's something that we, by instinct, know we should do, Lord, but it's difficult to do. So help us to do it, God, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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