

Designer Christianity

by John Fischer

John Fischer's sermon critiques the trend of adapting the Gospel to fit cultural norms, emphasizing the need for authenticity in Christian living.

Scripture: Matthew 5:16, Romans 1:16, 2 Corinthians 4:1, Galatians 2:20, 1 Peter 3:15

Topics: "Gospel Integrity", "Christian Authenticity"

Description

John Fischer preaches about the danger of dressing up the Gospel to make it more appealing to the world, emphasizing the importance of presenting the truth plainly and honestly without altering the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. He highlights the need for Christians to live out the reality of their faith in their daily lives, expressing hope, confessing sin, embracing forgiveness, enduring suffering, and sharing God's love. Fischer stresses that the Gospel doesn't need to be altered or disguised, but rather it is the transformation in believers' lives that should be commended to others.

Transcript

I'm ready to go dancing, but what do I wear?

The clothes the church gave me are totally square.

I need to hit the floor with a little flare--

Something that looks like I'm going somewhere.

So dress me up in the clothes of my culture.

Give me some style; put on the luster.

And they'll think that the Gospel has got to be keen

When they see me dressed up in my Calvin Klein jeans!

A good picture says it all; and this one was good. When Calvin Klein first came out with topless designer-jean ads, one artist gave us a backside view of a female clad only in jeans. On the back pocket, a partially torn-away patch bearing the familiar fish sign with the letters JESUS covered all but the first four letters of "Calvin Klein." The illustration was entitled "Dressing Up the Gospel."

That picture perfectly captured a Christianity in confusion. The Jesus sticker was reminiscent of the sixties, but not the jeans. Sixties' jeans had holes, and the tacky Jesus patch would have

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been found amid various other patches, macrame, and graffiti. Those were the days when faith was real and radical. A generation of hippies had temporarily rejected the materialism of their parents and found, to their surprise, that the words of Jesus were also seasoned with anti-establishment salt.

The old jeans were folded away in the attic, materialism was embraced with greater intensity than the former generation had ever imagined, and the Gospel was joined to Calvin Klein. And in many ways this unlikely marriage appears as incompatible as the sign of the fish over tight-fitting designer jeans.

In essence, the new born-again society that emerged from the revivals of the sixties has dressed itself up in the clothes of popular culture.

In the process, it has also tried to dress up the Gospel by making it easy, fun, and popular. It has produced a Gospel compatible with materialism, shaping it to feel good, sensational, and glamorous. In short, it has dressed up the Gospel in whatever designer clothes the world happens to be admiring.

It may be an innocent mistake born from sincere evangelistic fervor, but in the end, fashion robs the Gospel of its power. The new born-again society has accepted the misguided assumption that it must convince the world that being a Christian is a good thing. But not only that, becoming born again is the thing to do. It's hip.

In light of this, we need to pay close attention to Paul's words in 2 Corinthians: "Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor. 4:1-2).

The Apostle is telling us that the Gospel doesn't need to be tampered with or altered in any way. There's nothing to hide, nothing to change. The Gospel is perfectly capable of taking care of itself; our only responsibility is to proclaim it plainly before every man's conscience.

Each person, deep in their own conscience, will ultimately accept or reject the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. The choice someone makes is beyond our control. Our business is to clearly present the truth, not by dressing up the Gospel,

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but by living out the reality of our lives before people. Paul put it simply: "We commend ourselves."

Nothing needs to be done to the Gospel. Everything's already been done. But there is much that needs to be done in our lives by the Gospel. There is hope to be expressed, sin to be confessed, forgiveness to be embraced, suffering to be endured, glory to be shared, love to be received, and love to be given. It is the presence of all this happening in our lives that we commend to someone else.

If the Gospel is alive in me and I introduce myself to someone, I am introducing them to the Gospel. If it is not alive in me, no amount of dressing it up is going to convince anyone; but, on the contrary, it will mask the real truth.

The issue, therefore, is not how to present the Gospel, but how to make certain it is living in me -- a much more difficult issue. It means deep questioning, soul-searching, and observing myself continually in light of the truth. "Undressing" would be a more appropriate expression of this process than "dressing up."

So David was right after all. Dressing up, if it protects us from having to be honest, is nothing more than cover-up. The success of the Gospel in our present age does not depend on how attractively it is packaged, but on how honestly real Christians are living out their lives in the world. That's a message you simply cannot dress up, especially if you tell the whole truth about yourself.

We don't use deception. We won't draw people into a net and then surprise them with the Gospel. We set forth the Gospel plainly through words of truth and words of honesty from our lives. We trust God, the Great Designer, to handle His own image.

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