

Ask What You Can Do For The Church

Joe Slater

This past week marked the 53rd anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy (November 22, 1963). Our purpose here is not to explore the various conspiracy theories, moral failures, or political viewpoints pertaining to President Kennedy. Instead, consider with me what may well be the most famous line he ever uttered. His inaugural address on January 20, 1961, included this challenge: “My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.”

Over the ensuing 53 years, we have become a vastly more “me-oriented” culture. Burger King’s slogan, “Have it your way,” epitomizes what we have come to expect – indeed, to demand – in virtually every area of life. While having it your way may be appropriate for selling fast food, it is an unmitigated disaster in the eternal matters of the spirit.

If I may paraphrase President Kennedy: “My fellow Christians, ask not what the church can do for you; ask what you can do for the church.” Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself said that He “*did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:45). And Paul the apostle told the church he would “*very gladly spend and be spent for your souls*” (2 Corinthians 12:15).

Consumerism is choking the church. An unbelieving, self-centered world demands: “Give me what I want the way I want it; tell me what I want to hear; let me do what I want to do. Otherwise, I’ll go somewhere else.” God, on the other hand, demands that people change. The very word “conversion” means change. The word “repent” means a change of one’s mind. God does not offer to change His requirements to

satisfy our whims. He commands us to change to comply with His holy will.

What, then, can the church do? Some congregations have caved in under the pressure, catering to the most current craze instead of holding fast to the New Testament pattern. Biblical gender roles offend radical “feminism.” Absolute truth offends post-modernism. The list is virtually endless. Christians must choose: either submit to the latest “ism” that has cropped up, or firmly uphold the timeless truth of God’s word.

Christians can and should accommodate culture to the degree that we can do so without compromising Scripture. Paul became “*all things to all men*” in order to reach them with the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:22). Where culture and Scripture conflict, however, our duty is not to pour Scripture through the filter of culture, but to change the culture if we can, and resist it if we cannot change it.

Seldom, if ever, has God’s way suited humanity’s inclinations. Let the church hearken first to God, and only secondarily to the world we seek to reach.

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Wills and Relatives

There’s an old saying: “Where there’s a will, there are relatives.” There’s an even older saying: “Where there is no will, there are even more relatives!”

Isn’t it sad that Howard Hughes never really knew how many friends and relatives he had!

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It has been well-said that no one ever sank under the burden of the day. It is when tomorrow’s burden is added that the weight is more than one can bear.

George MacDonald

Both quotes above via RSVP newsletter

LIKE A PERSECUTED CHURCH

Imagine it’s Sunday morning. You and your family put on jeans and t-shirts and get ready to go to the mountains. You carry with you a large picnic basket and your children carry with them a baseball and a couple gloves. You arrive at the mountains, pile out of the car and take about a two-mile trek on a trail that apparently leads to your picnic area. As you make your way along the trail, you keep a watchful eye to make sure that no one is following you. Finally, you arrive at a bend in the trail where you are greeted by two men who point to a hidden cave off the trail about a hundred yards away. The two men remain on the trail, keeping a vigilant watch. As you enter the cave, you are warmly greeted with embraces by several other families who have already arrived. The gloves and ball are put aside. The picnic basket is emptied, a false bottom removed, and four Bibles are distributed to your family. Lanterns are lit, and the group moves deeper into the cave. Meanwhile, the two men who were watching the path now make their way to the cave, cover the entrance with brush, and also join you in a deep recess in the cave. Everything is now ready. It’s now time for worship services to begin.

While such a scenario seems so unlikely to ever become a reality for most of us reading this, it is what countless brothers and sisters in Christ have had to do in other times, and in other places in order to worship God without reprisal.

Question: If you were a member of a persecuted church, how would it change you? Would worship become more meaningful to you, and less rote? Would the bonds of fellowship you have with those who share the same convictions about Jesus be strengthened and treasured more than they are treasured presently? Would your prayer life be stronger and more vital to your daily life? Would you be more willing to overlook personality differences and even conflicts with those who share your faith and who share the willingness to risk their lives? Would you be less likely to pick flaws with each other and more likely to search out ways to maintain peace? Would you be less critical about peripheral matters that really seem to bother you today?

Lord, help us behave more like a persecuted church!

--Steve Higginbotham (Knoxville, TN) via Bulletin Gold