

Christian Curb Appeal

Intro: About a month ago the Catons, our missionaries to the Japanese, visited Bethel to give a ministry update. After the service was over many attendees went to the back of the church to participate in the chili cook-off. The deacons had to meet briefly after the service, so by the time we got back there I found many of the chili crock pots had been completely emptied. There were some chili options still available so I was able to eat and then vote on what I was able to choose from, and they were still very delicious even though they were “what was left”. It got me to thinking about why certain chili’s got cleaned out right off the bat while some others chili’s, arguably just as delicious, were left behind. I came to the conclusion that it was “chili curb appeal”. I often see people (and am guilty myself) at these potluck dinners scouting out the options to select what looks best to them. This is based off a visual appraisal with the hopes the taste will be just as appealing. I came to realize we employ this strategy frequently in life. How often do we base decisions we make off of visual examination, or first encounter experiences? We “taste” with our eyes for a sample, before we commit to dipping in for the real experience. Even babies tend to look at more attractive people. I used to wonder why babies seemed to avoid looking at me until I read an article that babies have been found to enjoy attractive people more than “less attractive”. Then I started thinking about this in terms of Christians, and what our Christian curb appeal is like to others, other Christians, and more importantly non-Christians. 2 Corinthians 5:20 says “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” Paul is telling us what our role as Christians is to be. Just as a political ambassador lives in a foreign land, representing the interests of their home and Lord, so too do Christians represent Jesus and His message to the world. This world is not our home, I’m just passing through, but God is making His appeal to the world through His ambassadors, us, while we’re passing through. So in a very simple shallow term, we are the curb appeal of God to the world around us. Just like ambassadors might have to represent their sender in some potentially dangerous and volatile areas, we as Christians may have to represent Christ in areas or ways that are not very comfortable for us. However in these harsh conditions we may face, we still have to accurately represent our sender, Jesus Christ. So what as Christians are we actually to do to accurately represent Jesus Christ? What does Christ want or expect from us as His curb appeal?

1. Disclaimer – I am not teaching on this subject out of a false self impression of having reached some kind of peak in this battle. I’m sharing this topic with you as someone who has been recognizing this weakness in my life and struggling to, through God’s strength and grace, overcome this weakness. I am constantly daily failing, and seeing

how my failures impact those around me. So I'm sharing with you my thoughts and what I've learned on my journey.

2. While I am going to be speaking on our "curb appeal" or the way Christians should appear. I don't intend to suggest that we should be focusing on outward appearance only. A false outer shell will only work for so long before what we carry in our heart will bubble out. Matthew 15:18-19 says 18 But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. James 3: 11-12 says 11 Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? 12 Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water. The subjects of Christian appearance we're going to be looking at need to be changes made on the inside that reflect outward as sincere evidence of our faith. This past fall I was looking for a drain pipe that extended from my house foundation to the ditch in front of my home. After digging up my lawn I couldn't find it and gave up. It was hidden well, but this spring when the rains came and the snow melted I noticed bubbling in my ditch. The pipe was hiding under the bottom layer of dirt in my ditch so close to wear I'd been digging. Once the storms came and everything became muddy, what was hidden bubbled up and became apparent. This is how "fake" outward only Christians will be found out. When the storms of life muddy up their life, and their true inward self bubbles out. Someone who claims and appears to be a Christian, but does not inwardly live as a Christian can do immense damage. BBC Large Blue Butterfly video illustration. Just as the caterpillar mimics the appearance of the queen ant and is brought into the ant nest like a wolf in sheep's clothing, Christians can portray themselves outwardly as a follower of Christ, while on the inside do not commit to Christ's ways. They can do immense damage to the name of Christ by claiming to be a Christian, but living as a hypocrite in the world, just as the carnivorous Blue Butterfly caterpillar laid waste to the ant nest.
3. Who has had a moment/day where you felt good about yourself, your confidence was high. Maybe you're having a good hair day or are feeling a bit more in shape. Then hours into your day you look in a mirror and discover food in your teeth, boogers hanging out of your nose, and a giant pimple in an obvious location? The mirror has given you a reality check on your false confidence. It shows you what you could not see on your own. When it comes to our Christian walk we have to turn to our spiritual mirror, the Bible. The Bible is God's way of showing us what we need to correct, add, or remove from our life. So we're going to use that "mirror" as our instruction guide for what a Christian should look like.
4. If we were to go through every element and point of what Christ taught that we are to do and look like, we'll be here all day. So with that in mind we're going to hit some high

points, but I'll strongly encourage you to on your own dive into the Scriptures and research the person of Jesus Christ, and what he would want in your life and walk.

5. Origin of the term Christian. In Scripture we first see this come up in Acts 11:25-26 *25 So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.* At the time that believers were called *Christians*, it was common for the Greeks to give satirical nicknames to particular groups. So the believers who followed after Jesus Christ were dubbed Christians as more of an insult than a reverent term. However the term was embraced as being identified as being like Christ is what we are to strive for as followers of Christ. So my first point of what a Christian should look like is very simple, **a Christian should look like Christ**. Simple, but easier said than done. Christ walked a perfect life, something we will not be able to achieve, but should still earnestly attempt. We are called to stand out and be a "peculiar" people. We are not to conform to the world, but conform to Christ! Who are you allowing to mold you, and into what image? The old acronym WWJD still holds true, What Would Jesus Do?
6. The next point of what a Christian should look like as described by Jesus is **a Christian should love like Christ**. Matthew 22:36-40 says *36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."* Jesus placed an immense amount of importance on love. John 13:34-35 says *34 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. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* Jesus says here that people should recognize us as His disciples by our love that we show others. If the kind of love Jesus showed us was the focal point of our daily lives and all our interactions with others, almost everything else would fall in line. In 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 we see that without love we are nothing. *1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned,[a] but have not love, I gain nothing.* None of our other works, skills, or words will matter if it is without love. So that is where we need to start. If love was involved in every word we say we'd probably never tear anyone down, but build them up. If love were the reason behind our actions we'd do more service for others and worry less about ourselves. Example of the time I didn't help a lady with a walker get her dog out of Pet Supplies Plus. I missed an opportunity to

serve someone else and show them the love of God. We need to be searching out these opportunities to love others.

7. **A Christian should live for the glory of Christ.** John the Baptist put it like this in John 3:30 30 He must increase, but I must decrease. To love a life that glorifies God we have to give God priority in our life. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says 31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. It's easy to get wrapped up in the ribbons and glitter of this life, but so much of what seems important to us is a distraction. Like a toddler receiving an amazing gift, how often do they ignore the real prize inside to play with the wrapping paper or box? We can do that as well in a larger way. We ignore the real meat of the meaning of our life to focus on the distractions. The material things that we often place so much importance on will have little meaning in the scale of our eternity. Examples being cars, porches on our homes, new phones, vacations... Sometimes we have to sacrifice what we want to give preference to what God wants. Service to the church or others when we would rather sit on the back deck with a coffee. Much like how Jamey Bubb and the other volunteers gave up a beautiful Saturday morning to wash windows at church a few weeks ago. We need to do that within the church, but also outside the church to serve others as a way to bring them to Christ. Ways we can give glory to God are many. Take responsibility for our sins and turn them over to God for forgiveness. 1 John 1:9 says 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We need to allow God to restore our relationship by giving up the sins interfering with it. There should also be fruit evident in our life to show our relationship with God. John 15:8 says 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. We should be forthright and open about praising God and giving Him thanks. Psalms 50:23 says 23 The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!''. We are to be content with what we have, we are to pray to God and fear and respect Him, and we are to openly share God's Word and Gospel with others so that they may know Him as well. The list goes on, but these are a great place to start.
8. **A Christian's speech should betray they are a follower of Christ.** The tongue is mentioned in over 120 passages, and many of them are about using the tongue wisely. Proverbs 12:18 says 18 There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. The way a Christian speaks in various situations should be evidence that they are a follower of Christ. Our speech should bring wisdom and healing. Filthy and rash language does not make us stand out as a Christian, but more likely the opposite. Topics of conversation should be kept clean as if though God Himself were speaking with you. At work I have a reputation for not swearing, however in a moment of frustration I did swear, and someone heard it. The result was like I shot

somebody. Everybody knew about it and was blown away almost immediately. My speech betrayed something different about me to the point that when I did swear people were shocked. Christians should not participate in conversations of backstabbing, gossip, or conversations that tear someone down. I personally find it so easy to fall into the habit of just joining into the mood of whatever conversation is happening, and before I know it I've verbally abused someone. Avoid that kind of conversation or deflecting it away from tearing down another person is the better way to handle that. Even more importantly don't be the person to start it! Don't let your frustration venting turn into a poisonous conversation. Ephesians 4:29 says 29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. Words that have left the tongue cannot be taken back! Does the way you talk put forward evidence that you are a follower of Christ?

9. The list of things we could go through is long. The way we dress, whether it is modest or not. The places we go or entertainment we partake in. Whether we drink in excess, get involved in drugs, or live a gluttonous lifestyle. Whether we are humble and submissive to God and those He puts in authority over us. Our gentleness and patience with those around us. Whether we seek peace with others, and unity with our Christian brothers and sisters. Whether we overcome temptation that would cause us to sin. Do we spend time in God's Word? Take time to reflect on your lives and the way you live them. Compare that reflection with Scripture and what God tells us in it. Does your life and the way you live it reflect God outwardly to others? Does your curb appeal show you're a follower of Christ? In the 1960's there were radio and tv debates between John J Kennedy and Richard Nixon. In the initial radio debates Richard Nixon seemed to be the winner, but once the debates moved to a televised picture platform John F Kennedy pulled ahead. Though there is some debate there is belief that John F Kennedy's appearance helped him pull ahead of Richard Nixon, and it swayed voters in his favor for the election. Does your curb appeal/appearance as a Christian sway people towards making a decision in favor of Jesus Christ, or is it a distraction away from possibly making a decision to follow Christ?