The Danger of Christian Catchphrases

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For two years, I worked as a writer for an advertising agency, where I spent my days figuring out the catchiest ways to brand products. We would spend hours brainstorming, scribbling, pacing, Googling, staring at parked cars, clicking pens and irritating each other, as we tried to come up with some immortal phrase that would outlive us. We enviously regarded legendary fast food slogans like “I’m lovin’ it” and “Finger lickin’ good,” while shaking our heads in amazement at the sneaker industry’s famously minimalistic “Just do it” and “Impossible is nothing” taglines. As a writer trying to condense complex ideas into a few simplistic, memorable and easily-repeatable words, I discovered the incredible potential of a good catchphrase. If it’s done right, it’ll be powerful enough to convey a thought clearly, and yet vague enough for people to fill in their own story. Catchphrases are an essential part of product marketing, because they create a positive association with a brand, and that’s the whole point of advertising. Good catchphrase, good feeling. When I left advertising to become a full-time pastor, however, I thought I was done with catchphrases. Turns out I wasn’t.

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Christian Catchphrases vs The Bible

One of the defining weaknesses of the modern, Western church is an unwillingness to read and retain Scripture, and because of this, much of the church has lost touch with the clear boundaries set by the Bible. When something goes missing, though, something else has to rise up to take its place, and as a result, we've seen popular catchphrases introduced, embraced and repeated as if they were Scripture.

"Love Wins"

"Love Wins" started as the title of a book, but soon took on a life of its own, transcending the actual content of the book. That two-word sentence dares you to disagree with it: how could love not win? Didn't Paul say that faith, hope and love remain, and that love is the greatest? And yet it's infuriatingly vague. What love? Whose love? The Bible says that God is love, but that phrase tries to turn love into God. There are many Christians who consider themselves born again, yet have allowed that man-made catchphrase to carry the same weight as Scripture. Because, hey, it sounds good and it's easier to remember.

> Love doesn't win – God wins.

"God is Always in a Good Mood"

There's another recent catchphrase that has been less widespread and certainly less damaging, but which still carries a subtle danger: 'God is always in a good mood'. The people that created this phrase are Spirit-filled, Bible-preaching believers, who have clearly tried to correct what they see as a deficiency in the understanding of God's goodness. But while I respect and honour their work in the Kingdom, I believe that by creating a catchphrase that goes outside of Biblical boundaries to make an absolute, unchanging statement about God, they've made a mistake. For someone who does not know much Scripture, the idea that God is always in a good mood comes as a pleasant surprise. But is He always? Paul warned the Corinthian church that some of them were dying – dying! – because they took the Lord's supper in an unworthy manner (1 Corinthians 11:27-32). Was God in a good mood during those meetings? In Revelation 2:20-23, Jesus matter-of-factly told the leader of the church in Thyatira that He was going to strike dead the children of a wicked woman the church had received as a prophetess, but not before casting her on a bed of suffering. Was He in a good mood when He said this? Surely we can say that God is always good, because that's the testimony of Scripture. But it's unbiblical to introduce that goodness as a mood that He will never deviate from, and it can give believers a false sense of Him always being happy with us, no matter what. Through the cross we are at peace with God (Romans 5:1-2), but it's clear that He can still get very upset with the things we do. I have no

doubt that the church leaders who coined this phrase know all these things and have a balanced, holistic view, but that isolated catchphrase has traveled further than any broader statements they might hold to.

> And God isn't always in a good mood – He's always in a God mood.

The Church Needs Sound Doctrine

The church doesn't need clever catchphrases. More than ever before, it needs sound doctrine. The key for us as believers is to stay in the Word; to absorb Scripture into the marrow of our bones. To take the long, slow road of careful study, and leave behind the smooth highway of short, snappy, feel-good sound bites. So let's get it straight: Love doesn't win – God wins. And God isn't always in a good mood – He's always in a God mood. God will be faithful to His own character, no matter what we say about Him. Thankfully, that character is good, loving and trustworthy, but it's also a lot of other things that we might not be comfortable with. And we're far better off when we just pay attention to everything He's said about Himself than when we use our own advertising skills to add to it. Photo: El Wali El Alaoui [CC BY 2.0 ()], via Wikimedia Commons