

The Church & The Culture:

Being A City On A Hill When Everything Is Going Downhill

Sunday, August 19, 2012 @ The Bridge

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We're not in Kansas anymore! A tornado of change is blowing through our culture. Attitudes, beliefs, & opinions are rapidly changing about relationships, marriage, & human sexuality. What does *life with God* look like in the midst of this constantly changing cultural landscape? Today we continue our journey to find the brains, courage & heart for such a time as this.

As followers of Christ, how do we find the courage to respond in a Christ-like way when the biblical standards that we hold dear are ignored, laughed at, and even seen as evil? Rightly did Isaiah prophesy when he said, "*Woe to those who call evil good & good evil, who put darkness for light & light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet & sweet for bitter.*" (**Isaiah 5:20**)

The moral climate of our culture in terms of human sexuality is not unlike the time of the Judges when the Scriptures remind us, "*everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*" (**Judges 21:25**) This *anything goes* attitude about human sexuality is fraught with all kinds of danger. The Scriptures warn, "*there is a way that seems right to a man but its way is the way of death.*" (**Prov. 14:12**)

As we began this series last week, we began by acknowledging that this series is all about **God**. It is about God's design for relationships, marriage, & human sexuality. As the Creator of Human Sexuality, He Alone can accurately define its meaning & purpose. We seek a biblical understanding of homosexuality.

[For further study, read Randy Alcorn's blog post entitled, "*Are Homosexual Sins Worse Than Other Sins?*" <http://tinyurl.com/9zj9s8e>]

Why did God create human beings in the first place? He did it reflect His glory in & through human beings. God has created us in His Image to reflect His glory & greatness. The entire universe was created through Christ, in Christ, for Christ! Every square inch of the Universe is intended to reveal Christ in some distinct way. Everything points to Christ!

As we considered last week, the greatest injustice, the greatest evil in the world is that every person, every nation, every tribe & every culture is NOT honoring, worshipping, & serving God. Our world is in active rebellion against God. American culture is no different.

The Gospel message proclaims that our God entered into our broken world to rescue sinners, & to begin the restoration of all things by introducing His Kingdom in the midst of the cultures & nations & tribes of this world! Jesus said, "*The Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand!*" (Matt. 3:2) His Jewish followers wrongly assumed that He would be a conquering General that would overthrow the kingdoms of this world. Jesus is far more than a military conqueror or a political reformer. He is King of all Kings, & Lord of all Lords. He is the image of the invisible God in bodily form. He has explained Him. He is the eternal God/Man! And Jesus reminded Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world!

Followers of Jesus make two mistakes in regards to the culture around them.

1. CONFORMITY: They Conform to the culture & embrace it. As a result, they lose all the distinctives that go along with being a Kingdom person.

Romans 12:2 in *The Message*: *“don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking...unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity...”*

2. CONFLICT: They enter a warfare mode. They resist & fight all the cultural changes that they don’t like. Sometimes, conflict is manifested by simply retreating from the culture.

Both are wrong responses to the culture. God is showing us a Third Way! How can we know the way? Jesus said, I AM the way...(John 14:6)

Our God, the one-true living God, “the Creator of the universe has breathed out a book. We can read the mind of God revealed in this book.” (John Piper)

READ MATTHEW 5:13-16. **13** “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. **14** “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. **15** Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

Two principles for a “salt & light” lifestyle: Acceptance doesn’t mean Agreement. Love doesn’t mean Approval. In other words, we can accept & love other people that we may not agree with or approve of their lifestyle choices.

1. THE KINGDOM OF GOD & THE AMERICAN CULTURE ARE NOT THE SAME THING!

Jesus faced a dilemma in **Luke 20:19-26**. The issue was paying taxes to Caesar. His enemies tried to trick him & trap him in a “no-win” situation. Are you for Caesar or against Caesar? No matter which way He answered, they thought they had Him checkmated. If He answered, “Pay the tax.” The people would lose faith in Him because they hated the Romans. If He answered, “Don’t pay the tax,” then they could accuse Him of insurrection & treason.

(v.24) *Show me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?* They said, Caesar’s. He said to them, *“Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”* They marveled at His answer.

Jesus is taking the discussion to a higher level: people should give themselves to God because they bear His image and likeness, namely, themselves.

2. WE ARE NOT AT WAR WITH THE CULTURE!

Followers of Christ have wrongly assumed that we are at war with the culture. As a result, we’ve resorted to earthly tactics & strategies to steer the

country back to its so-called Christian roots. Conquest by the ballot box, economic bullying, name-calling, & harassment have all been used by Christians to bully the culture into seeing it our way.

In **John 18:36**, Jesus tells Pilate that His Kingdom is not of this world. *“My kingdom is not of this world. If My Kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But My Kingdom is not from the world.”*

Christians spread their faith by suffering, not by causing suffering!

We have a different agenda because we serve a different King! We are not at war with the culture because Jesus wasn't at war with the culture. What about the whips & overturning the money-changers' tables? Glad you mentioned that, Jesus was at war with the religious establishment...not the culture.

3. THE CULTURE IS AT WAR WITH US BECAUSE IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN AT WAR WITH CHRIST!

Matthew 5:10-12, Jesus said, *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (11) Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account. (12) Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

John 15:20--Remember the word that I said to you: *“A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.”*

Last week, Dr. Al Mohler, president of Southern Seminary appeared on the CNN program “Out Front with Erin Burnett” to talk about same-sex marriage. He discussed the power of the Gospel to change human behavior. Burnett responded to Mohler's comments & described them as “CRAZY” & “HATEFUL.”

So what does the wider culture think of us? CRAZY & HATEFUL?

Remember, every nation, every tribe, every people group is in active rebellion against God! As followers of Christ, we have rebelled against the rebellion. We are truly counter-cultural. We are, in a very real sense, aliens, strangers and outcasts in our own country. Maybe that's the way it should be.

Maybe they don't like us because they don't like our King. How should we respond? With Christ-like love & compassion. Jesus said, *“Love your enemies & pray for those who persecute you.”* (Matt. 5:44)

As Christ followers, we truly are just a remnant, a small, rag-tag bunch of counter-revolutionaries. George Barna has recently stated that only 19 million American subscribe to a truly biblical worldview. 19 Million! That's about six percent of the American population. Six percent won't win many elections.

GETTING HONEST WITH GOD:

As rocky as the road may be, amid all the complexities and changes in our culture, our goal remains clear: Bear witness to the Supremacy, Centrality & Lordship of Jesus Christ!

Our message can be understood in one word: **Jesus**. Need three words? **Jesus is Lord!** Jesus is the King of this new heavenly Kingdom that will last for eternity. If the Gospel message could be shared in 30 words, we could share it like this: **“The Gospel is the Good News that God has come to us to show us His love, to save us from sin, to set up His Kingdom, & to shut down religion.”** [Bruxy Cavey inspired this tri-layered description.]

How you think about & relate to God is the most important thing about you. Life with God is the most glorious thing a person can ever have. Life without God is the most horrifying reality anyone can ever face. Every life is better with God at the center of that life.

Frank Viola recently shared 12 reasons why he's a Christian. Reason #8: *“Because Jesus is the most compelling, intriguing, awe-inspiring, and amazing person I know of who is worthy of the greatest admiration, obedience, love, and worship. To my mind, truth, justice, and beauty are all grounded in Him, and His story (as told in the Gospels) trumps every other story known to humanity.”*

[Frank's entire 12 reasons list can be found here: <http://tinyurl.com/cm8u2at>]

Life with God begins with some radically honest soul-searching. What we think about God, what we think about the culture we're in, & what we think about the Kingdom of God all lead us to the same place: **God's desperately desires for us to know Him, enjoy Him & to reflect His Glory forever & ever. We are destined to be His Image-bearers for all eternity!!**

Imagine yourself having this conversation with God:

“God, everything I am, I lay before you! Your ways are higher than my ways! You are God & I am not. Forgive me God, for shutting you out of my life and ignoring you & trying to live my life without you. I need you Jesus. I open my heart & my life to you. Enter into my heart & life. Forgive me. I'm trusting in you to guide and direct my path. Help me to flourish as a human being according to your ways & your path. In your name, Amen.”

Begin your life with God today. Trust Him completely. Follow Him starting today!