

YAMs

Summer Midweek 2010



The Gospel, The Culture and The Church: a radical reformation



yams summer midweek 2010 | wednesdays @ 6 p.m.

Week Two:

Reality: Why we need reformation



covenant chapel

REALITY:

Let's review a little from last week. We said that being a Christian, following Jesus, is not just a set of rules to follow, but joining Jesus on his mission. We said that the three aspects of that mission are a call to:

- **The Gospel** – to love God, to have faith in the work of Jesus to save sinners.
- **The Culture** – to love the people of our world, local and global
- **The Church** – to love our fellow followers of Jesus

And we talked about the need for us to love all three of these and interact with all of them well.

But tonight, we are talking about reality. The fact is that, though we are called to all three of these, we often don't do a good job. Good examples seem to be rare.

QUESTION: What have you found? What experiences/examples have you seen of the interaction of the gospel, culture and church? What examples can you remember from the news, from friends or from your own life?

Sadly, as many examples illustrate, we very rarely fulfill our mission. Although we are called to each aspect of this three-fold mission – the gospel, the culture, and the church – we can only seem to pursue one or two of them simultaneously. And when we miss even one of the three, this whole thing breaks down and we fail in our mission.

QUESTION: What does it look like if we omit one or more of the three aspects?

- **Culture – Gospel – Church = THE WORLD**
The Culture minus the gospel and minus the church is the world. It is the people of the world who don't know Christ and don't have loving community with believers. Those who have a relationship with Christ by definition don't fit into this group, although they can often struggle with looking just like the world.
- **Gospel – Culture – Church = MONK or LONE RANGER**
When you just have the gospel without the culture and without the church, you are basically the equivalent of a monk – isolated from the loving community we were designed for and isolated from the culture that needs transformation. In this trap, we selfishly hoard the gospel to ourselves and are content to leave everyone else, including our fellow Christian brothers to their own lives.

- **Church – Gospel – Culture = COUNTRY CLUB**

The church void of the gospel and void of the culture lacks power and purpose. It is no different from a country club or any other type of social venue where people – usually exactly like each other – get together to talk, do activities, and care about each other and no one else.

- **Gospel + Culture – Church = PARACHURCH**

Many Christians become so frustrated with the church that they try to bring the gospel to the culture without it. This is called parachurch and it is not an inherently bad thing. Great organizations like YoungLife, Campus Crusade for Christ, Compassion International and many others are in this category. They are successful because they are true to the gospel and very involved in the culture, while the church often is isolated in its own irrelevant subculture. But parachurch by itself leads to a different trap for several reasons:

- It can connect people to Jesus without other believers, which can lead to immaturity and lack of depth of Christian life
- It is often age specific and lacks the generational experience and wisdom of body of Christ
- Jesus gave special authority to leaders of the church (called pastors or elders in the New Testament). Parachurch ministry can lead to a low view of the Church and a low view of Church leadership and thereby blur the lines on issues like church discipline, doctrinal reliability, etc.
- It often omits one or more of the purposes for which Jesus established the church (evangelism; discipleship; care of widows, orphans and the poor; sacraments, etc.)

- **Culture + Church – Gospel = LIBERALISM**

Some churches are so concerned with being culturally relevant that they do away with the truth of the gospel in order to reach people of the culture. They end up converting people to good works and to the church, but not to Jesus. The gospel of Jesus has never been one of accommodation, but one of transformation – and as the church takes the gospel into the culture, we must be different enough and have something to call the culture out of. Otherwise what's the point of anyone becoming part of the Church?

- **Gospel + Church – Culture = FUNDAMENTALISM**

Some churches get so entrenched in the solid doctrine and the church that they completely forget their purpose. These churches know the gospel and are generally very strong theologically, but rarely, if ever, take the gospel outside the walls of the church. These churches often exist just to bring people in, but not send people out.

QUESTION: Having explored the different traps we can fall into, which are you personally most prone to falling into? In your current or past church experiences, which direction do you naturally lean?

Personally, I am most prone to fall into the fundamentalist trap: pursuing the call to the gospel and to the church, but in so doing avoiding the culture altogether. It is also my belief that our church has historically fallen into this trap more than the others. From my limited experience as well as conversations with other pastors and ministry leaders, this seems to be the norm among many theologically conservative churches, particularly in the Midwest.

QUESTION: How do we change? How do we pursue our call to all three aspects of our mission: the gospel, the culture and the church?

We have learn to live in the tension of being followers of Christ who are culturally liberal, theologically conservative, and driven by the truth of the gospel to love God, love our brothers, and love our neighbors.

We have to begin to take risks – to go into places that don't seem natural or appealing and to be around people we wouldn't necessarily be best friends with. When we are most prone to the trap of fundamentalism (staying in Christian community), we should seek out places where people who don't know Jesus spend time. While maintaining Biblical principles for living and the truth of the gospel, we should enter into culture – not expect people from the culture to come to us.

Very few churches do this well, but the ones who do see people truly being transformed, built up and sent out. My prayer and heart is that Covenant Chapel be a church that accepts all three folds of this mission Jesus gives us. I want nothing more than that each of us would love God, love our brother and love our neighbor.

FOR NEXT TIME:

Perceptions: *what our culture (rightly) thinks about the church*

We're off next week, but for the next time we meet on June 23, consider what our culture thinks about the church and the gospel. Start asking people – a great way to start conversations about your faith is to ask people questions about their opinions of the church and of Christian beliefs. We will explore perceptions the culture has about the church which, for better or for worse, tend to be accurate.