

The Glory of God in the Gospel of God, How Has the Culture Shaped the Gospel?

Selected Text, Preached @ Harambee Church by Pastor Michael Gunn on June 15th, 2008

“The conservative evangelicals, were often unaware of the cultural conditioning of their religion and therefore guilty, as many of them now recognize of confusing the gospel with the values of the American way of life without realizing what they were doing.”¹

Leslie Newbigin

*“But when I saw that they were **straightforward** about the truth of the gospel...”*

Galatians 2:14a

Intro:

We have been taking a look at the gospel and its result in our lives for the past 3 weeks. We have defined the gospel as the, **“Good News’ of His in-breaking into human culture in order to justify and save His people (Through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ), and establish His kingdom/Lordship (Through the establishment of His Church) to the glory of His name.”**

For the past two weeks we have seen how the gospel “shapes” us (Create our new identity), and then “leads” us toward living in a way that is *“Worthy of the gospel of Christ”* (**Philippians 1:27** see too **Ephesians 4:1**). Today we are furthering our study of the glory of God in the gospel of God by looking at how the culture shapes our gospel. Next week we are going to take a look at how the gospel goes into a culture and takes a positive shape of that culture, but today we are going to see how the culture negatively affects the gospel of Jesus Christ without us knowing it.

From the Head...

It would be easy to do a sermon on how the culture shapes us by pointing to the “Sinful” things we do. But that would be too simplistic, and assumes that the gospel was a moral restructuring instead of something far more profound and hope filled. The worldviews and philosophies within a culture often shape us without us knowing it. The reason we do sinful things is because our mind has been restructured to believe a different gospel. This starts in the garden. God gives Adam and Eve a clear story, yet they chose to believe in another *“Has God said...?”* (**Genesis 3:1**). It is this restructuring toward our own desire to be god that shapes the gospel we preach.

It is imperative that we do not fear culture, but we also need to be aware of culture and it’s influence on our thinking. Producer/Director Oliver Stone reminds us of this need when he says, *“I think with movies we can begin to strengthen people’s immune systems, because people go into the movies with their defenses down. It’s not real, therefore not threatening. When they least expect it, that might be the best time for the **guerillas of art**² to get in there and move the head and the heart”* It is not just the media/artist that shape our culture, and subsequently our thinking, but our art culture are often influenced by a much more subtle and deeper conditioner. Our language and the way we perceive things affect the way we do life.

We are often conditioned in our thinking by our culture more than we often care to admit. We are deeply shaped by the language and “Plausibility Structures” of the culture’s worldview. In the west, the way we know (Epistemology) is formed solely through our own human reason. We live and breathe here, and do not even think of questioning this in spite of the fact that the biblical “Epistemology” begins in God (Revelation), not our own reason! To this missiologist Leslie Newbigin writes *“There can be no knowing without personal commitment. We must believe in order to know.”³* We can know God because He has revealed Himself (Through nature **Psalms 19:1**; conscience **Romans 2:15**; His prophets **Hebrews 1:1**; His word **2 Timothy 3:16**; **2 Peter 1:19,20**; the Holy Spirit **John 16:13-15**; and finally in His Son Jesus Christ **Hebrews 1:1-3**). Next we know Him by faith (**Romans 1:17**; **Hebrews 11:6**).

¹ Leslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapid Michigan, 2

² His term for the artist like himself to preach their “Gospel” when the defenses are down.

³ Leslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence: Faith Doubt and Certainty in Christian Discipleship*, Grand Rapids Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995, 50, This of course echoes Augustine’s “Credo ut intelligam

Some Clear Ways We and Our Gospel Are Shaped By Our Culture

1. Pluralism
2. Rationalism
3. Individualism
4. Consumerism
5. Negative Capitalism
6. Nationalism/Racism
7. Comfort vs. Suffering

We Cannot Be Shaped By the World... (Colossians 2:6-10)

The gospel, as we will see next week, connects with the ultimate hopes and stories of the culture, but it also challenges those same stories. Sinful culture exchanges the hope of the gospel, with half truths, and temporal hope. The gospel needs to challenge the very foundations of cultural systems. Romans 12:2 reminds us not to be *"Conformed to this world,"* and 1 John 2:15 tells us *"Not to love the world, nor the things of the world."* These aren't separatist passages, but like Colossians 2:8, we are reminded not to be *"Taken Captive"* by the world systems that destroy us in spite of its constant promise to bring life more abundantly.

...But Need to Be Shaped By the "Straightforward" Nature of the Gospel (Galatians 2:14)

When Paul confronted Peter, he does not confront them immediately in regards to his "racism," but he states that he is not *"Straightforward"* about the gospel truths, which means he is not living in line with it (See living "Worthy" above). This says something about us. Peter is a pillar of NT leadership. He is a founding father, and certainly a man of faith, yet his culture (Jewish) has shaped him, and ultimately his demonstration of the gospel. Paul has to remind Peter and reform his understanding of the gospel.

... to the Heart

What is your confidence in? We are taught from birth that we need to rely on ourselves, and our own ability. The gospel challenges this foundational truth of human nature. Even religious human nature desires to justify self by doing works that merit a righteousness of our own. Either way, we desire to trust our self for our own justification. Even those that profess Christ as savior often default to our human inclination to please God by doing works that will please Him, instead of remembering that He is pleased in His Son only! Let's not look at our culture as something to fear, but one that we can serve and proclaim the truth of the gospel to a broken world.