

PART III

THE PASTOR—HIS PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

UNDERSTANDING THE CULTURE

I. Introduction

- A. Our culture is becoming more secular and less Christian by the moment. At the rate of decline, by the year 2010 only about 25% of our culture will have any Christian sympathies.
- B. It is going to become more difficult to be a true minister of the gospel in our culture. Therefore, we must understand the presuppositions of our culture so as to keep from compromising the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

II. The Non-Christian Culture

A. General Facts

1. There is a sell out to evolution which teaches man came from nowhere, has no purpose for life and is going nowhere after life. Man is nothing but an animal (maybe the highest form of life) seeking nothing more than the fulfillment of his biological urges or his insatiable need for self-esteem.
2. All truth is relative and there are no absolutes; therefore, there are no objective moral absolutes. All that counts in life is what is meaningful and significant for the here and now. The issue of right and wrong is of no consequence. Life is merely the individual's pursuit of whatever he or she wants. Life has no higher purpose than personal gratification.
3. Truth is determined by majority vote or the general consensus of people. Because people's thinking changes, there is no absolute truth but relative truth as culture changes. There is no knowledge, no standard, no choice that is objective. NOTE: At least 67% of all Americans believe there is no absolute truth.
4. The only stable and highest virtue in this relativistic world is tolerance. The truly virtuous and intelligent person believes that any and all values, if held sincerely, are equally valid. However, there is real intolerance towards those who hold to any absolute truth. There are no absolutes except the absolute that there can be no absolutes.
5. Western culture is not a "Christian culture." It is a post-Christian culture, dominated by a relativistic worldview.

B. Western Culture's World View is Secular

1. "Secular" means "of this world" or "of this present age." Secularism places the emphasis on the here and now. The slogan, "You only go around this way once, so grab for all the gusto you can," says it all about the Hollywood view of secularism.
2. Secularism breeds instant gratification—sex, food, vacation, cars, wardrobes, drugs, etc. The philosophy of a secularist is, "I want what I want when I want it and it makes little difference how I get it as long as it is meaningful to me." There is no tomorrow and there is no value in yesterday.
3. Secularism is anti-historical. If there is no objective truth, there is no reason for objective interpretation of history, law or politics. Deconstructionism is revising history (revisionism). History and literature are rewritten to be politically correct with the spirit of the present age. Literature is reinterpreted in light of shifting social demands.
4. Since history has no meaning, then society has no tradition to draw upon, no lessons learned from the past. Bottom-line, take away a sense of history and you destroy the

Christian faith which is based on historical, objective facts—life, death and resurrection of Christ.

C. Western Culture's World View is Naturalistic

1. Secular humanism teaches that the world revolves around man, but this view has evolved into raw naturalism.
2. There is no supernatural. There is nothing beyond what we see or feel. The natural is supreme. Therefore, all nature is equal and there is no longer a reason for humanity to be considered the center of the universe.
3. Naturalism breeds a form of pantheism and gives root to the New Age cults, which says nature and spirit (God) are one.
4. In a totally relativistic world, it is impossible to say that one creature has greater worth than another, or even that an individual has greater worth than nature. Since humans come from nothing and are going nowhere, there is no basis for human dignity and no logical reason to believe that man is better than any other living creature.

D. Western Culture's World View is Utopian

1. Man is autonomous in the cosmos and is master of his own fate and destiny. As basically good, man has the capacity to create his own brave new world.
2. Education in time will solve all of man's social evils, for it is society that is evil, not the people who make up society.
3. The apparent wrongs which men do are explained away, or denied or else blamed on something else like big government, corrupt society, mental sickness, etc. All man's wrongs are due to the fact that he is a victim.
4. If there is no one else to blame and you still feel bad, then just kill the conscience by telling it that sin is not sin and harden it by all kinds of acts of sin.

E. Western Culture's World View is Pragmatic

1. Since man can never know truth, then good can only be measured by what works, and what works is therefore good.
2. The issue today is not, "Is it right?" but "Does it work?" The means justifies the end. The issue is not just, "If it feels good do it," but "If it works, do it."

III. The Evangelical Christian Culture

A. General Facts

1. The most influential Christian movement in the 1990's is the Church Growth Movement. It desires to bring renewal to American churches through the use of the human sciences (sociology, psychology, management, marketing and communications).
2. The Church Growth Movement has been highly influenced by American culture and the jury is still out on the long-range effects of this movement. The quest for "relevance" has produced growth slogans like, "seeker-friendly," "audience-driven" and "full-service" churches.
3. This movement needs to be evaluated honestly, lovingly and critically from the Bible so as to curb the excesses and errors.

B. The Church Growth Movement has Bought Into the World's Philosophy of Pragmatism

1. Pragmatism says, "If it works, do it." It is rooted in evolution and is relativistic, rejecting the notion of absolute right and wrong. Truth is that which is useful, meaningful and helpful.
2. When pragmatism is used to make judgment about right and wrong, or when it becomes a guiding philosophy of life, theology and ministry, inevitably it clashes with Scripture. For instance, the gospel does not always produce a positive response (1 Cor. 1:22-23; 2:14) and majority reaction is no test of truth (Matt. 7:13-14) and prosperity and success is not proof of spirituality (Job 12:6).

3. Often comedy, sideshow techniques, pop-psychology and other entertainment forms are used to draw a crowd. The belief being that whatever pulls in the most people is accepted as good without critical analysis.
4. Quite often theology takes a back seat to methodology. Almost anything seems to be in fashion today except Biblical preaching. The new pragmatism sees preaching, particularly expository preaching, as passé. Plainly declaring the truth of God's Word is regarded as unsophisticated, offensive and utterly ineffective. If it doesn't draw crowds, it is not worth using. Get people into the church by entertainment and weak preaching (or no preaching) and when they feel comfortable, they will be able to receive Biblical truth in small doses.
5. Great danger faces the evangelical church from within. Subtle error will soon lead to gross heresy. Someone has said, "If we trust worldly devices, we automatically relinquish the power of the Holy Spirit" (James 4:4, 1 John 2:15; Isa. 3 1: 1; Zech. 4:6).
6. There are many evangelicals today who believe the only way we Christians will reach the world is to become like the world. We must give the unchurched multitudes what they want. Surveys and marketing techniques are used to find out what the unchurched want and then services are designed to meet their felt needs. The goal is to entice people into the church by offering what they want, creating a friendly environment and catering to the very desires that constitute their strongest urge.

C. The Church Growth Movement is Market Driven

1. The goal in marketing is to make both the producer and the consumer satisfied, so anything that tends to make the consumer unsatisfied is to be jettisoned. Preaching about sin, righteousness and judgment is too confrontive to truly satisfy. The church must learn to couch the truth in ways that amuse and entertain.
2. Marketing principles are becoming the arbitrator of the truth. Elements of the Christian message which don't satisfy must be played down or omitted all together. Marketing savvy demands that the offense of the cross must be minimized. Teachings on sin, wrath and hell are too offensive for the unchurched.
3. Christians must deal with the fact that the gospel has been and will always be offensive to the unsaved man and Christians are not to be ashamed of the gospel (Rom. 1: 16) and be willing to suffer for it (2 Tim. 1:8).
4. Christian ministers are commanded to preach the Word, the whole counsel (Acts 20:27), without compromise (2 Tim. 4:1-4), even when people do not want it. NOTE: In 1 and 2 Timothy, the emphasis is upon faithfulness not fruitfulness, commitment not success, excellence not numbers.
5. Contemporary ministry philosophy is infatuated with worldly standards of success. The churches judged most successful are the large, rich mega-churches. But not one church in a thousand falls into that category. That means either most churches (and pastors) are failures or the true gauge of success of a ministry must be something other than numbers and prosperity (Jer. 5:30-3 1).
6. Preachers are to be true to the Word, pursuing the divine standard. Real success is not getting results at any cost. It is not prosperity, power, prominence or popularity. Real success is doing the will of God regardless of the consequences. The appropriate goal is not success but excellence.
7. Pastors are called upon to "correct, rebuke and encourage" (2 Tim. 4:2), for people will not want truth (2 Tim. 4:3). People will not want to hear the truth proclaimed but will want to be entertained. The Scripture does not say give people what they want to hear.
8. Most in the Church Growth Movement have lost their desire for confrontive preaching. Now the church flirts with serious doctrinal error. Christians pursue dreams and prophecies. Preachers refuse to speak on sin, judgment and hell. The modern gospel promises heaven without holiness. Churches ignore the teachings on sexual purity, homosexuality, the role of women, because they are controversial.
9. Most modern people want to be entertained. They want pleasant sensations and "feel good," "touchy-feely" preaching. They want their ears tickled with anecdotes, humor,

psychology, motivational lectures, reassurances, positive thinking, self-congratulations, ego-massaging sermonettes and agreeable small talk.

10. For those who choose to be true to the Word, there will be hardships and probably small churches. When we are faced with the choice of numbers or small churches, money or needs met, we can either stand fast or compromise. To compromise is to be unfaithful to Christ. We must fear God more than we fear men.

D. The Church Growth Movement is Man-Centered

1. Our present culture is entertainment oriented due to the media—radio, TV, movies, etc. In show business, truth is irrelevant; what really matters is entertainment. Substance counts for little and style is everything. This phenomenon has given rise to the mega-churches. They often feature impressive facilities - bowling lanes, movie theaters, gymnasiums, restaurants, roller-skating rinks and even ballrooms. Instead of the pulpit, the focus is on the stage. Churches are hiring full-time media specialists, programming consultants, stage directors, drama coaches, special effects experts and choreographers. Entertainment is man-centered when people come to church “to get” rather than “to give.”
2. Church services are made convenient and are designed to make people “feet good.” Feelings (experience) are exalted above truth. In actuality, the “user-friendly” churches may be promoting the worst trends of our culture. Feeding people’s appetites for entertainment only exacerbates the problems of mindless emotion, apathy and materialism.
3. The purpose for the church in the Church Growth Movement is to win men to Christ by entertaining them; therefore, church is held on Saturday, Sunday or Monday, with the emphasis being to get the unchurched into the church. The emphasis of the Bible is that the church met on the Lord’s Day to worship as a believing body. Unbelievers were allowed to come to services, but the service itself was to build up the Christians that they might be able to go out and win the lost (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 14:22-25; Eph. 4:11-16; Heb. 10:24-25).
4. The emphasis upon excessive growth is somewhat abnormal. Yet, the thrust is to make the gospel attractive to people and to do so the Bible is de-emphasized or used only as a tool to accomplish the end of numerical success. Popularization of Christianity causes churches to be constantly responding to the next cultural need of the world (and these needs are endless). NOTE: The Bible, however, says that the Lord adds to the church as Christians do the right things as a body (Acts 2:42-47; 1 Cor. 3:6-7).
5. Church Growth people are pragmatists. They care only about what works now whether there is Biblical precedence or not. The Biblicist wants to know what the Bible mandates and allows and apply it to the present culture. Yet, in the user-friendly churches, the audience is sovereign and the Sovereign God must take a back seat to people.
6. Churches today talk a lot about “felt needs,” that is, find out what people want and then give it to them, applying Biblical principles if possible. NOTE: “Felt needs” preaching has some glaring weaknesses.
 - a. Felt needs may never get down to man’s real spiritual needs which deal with sin, guilt, self-centeredness and judgment.
 - b. Felt needs preaching has to constantly be thinking of new felt needs and preaching must always be topical and not expository.
 - c. Felt needs preaching most often ignores the concepts of sin and judgment because they are offensive topics.
7. The Church Growth Movement is centered in a freewill (Arminian) and not Sovereign grace (Calvinistic) context. This concept says if we package the gospel right, people will get saved. The goal of market-driven ministry is an instantaneous human decision, rather than the radical transformation of the heart by the Almighty God through the Holy Spirit’s convicting work and the truth of the Word of God. NOTE: An honest belief in the sovereignty of God in salvation would bring an end to a lot of the abuses going on in the “user-friendly” churches.

8. Our society is filled with people who want what they want when they want it. They are into their own lifestyle, recreation and entertainment. They want comfort, happiness and success now. Churches which appeal to these base appetites cannot teach the Biblical emphasis upon holiness of life. Appealing to fleshly desires only fuels the fires which hinder true godliness.
9. The user-friendly church allows people in their midst with all kinds of sin in their lives because the emphasis is not to be judgmental or offend people. NOTE: Confronting Christians about their sin is not in vogue. Therefore, these kinds of churches cannot and will not exercise church discipline. The larger the church, the more difficult it becomes to exercise discipline. Without discipline, there can be no true local church.
10. The market-driven church which centers on giving people what they want rather than what they need, produces people who are “takers” rather than “givers.” The result is that there is very little commitment to Christ.
11. Market-driven, highly organized churches tend to minimize the supernatural and place great emphasis upon techniques. It is possible to organize the Holy Spirit right out of church, doing so in the name of God.

I. Conclusion

- A. It will become increasingly more difficult to be a Bible-believing Christian in America due to the government’s anti-Christian campaign and the Church Growth Movement which subtly uses Biblical terms, but is slowly shedding Biblical orthodoxy.
- B. The church will grow more worldly in the USA and those who preach the truth will suffer persecution from the unsaved and saved worlds (2 Tim. 3:12).
- C. Unless the Lord brings revival, the church in America as we know it will die.
- D. What the church needs today is not preachers who choose to compromise the Bible to get numbers, but preachers who will tell the truth (the whole counsel) and let God bring the numbers (elect) as He sees fit.
- E. User-friendly churches are a fad. In times of persecution, they will not stand.