

Series: **The Scandal of Grace** – week 9 of 11

CDOBC – beginning on 9/10/17

Today's Title: **"A Culture in Need of God's Grace"**

November 5, 2017 - Selected passages

OBJECTIVE: To help Christians know the way they interact with the culture may be different, but there are certain truths all Christians must practice as they engage the unbelieving culture.

Prayer of Dedication for Houston Team (going to Houston to serve with Samaritan's Purse in hurricane relief work)

I realize this doesn't include everyone, but our culture is a sports culture, which means a lot of people have allegiances to different teams. Sometimes these different teams have long-standing rivalries. (ASU & U of A slides)

However, some of these rivalries, instead of being a fun event, they turn into a very ugly and hateful event both on and off the field.

We see this most often in the world of soccer, where passions for team and country runs rampant and riots seem to be commonplace at some matches.

Instead of competition, it becomes ardent opposition.

But, this is not limited to the world of sports.

All throughout our culture, we seem to have lost the ability to speak with someone who holds differing views, and this inability to speak with each other in a respectful way leads to seeing them as the opposing side - enemies - combatants.

The most unfortunate thing is how this combative attitude has infiltrated the Church, and many Christians view the non-believing culture as the enemy - as the opposition. When this happens, the Church acts in ways that are absolutely contrary to the mission Christ gave His Church. The Church becomes like Jonah - running the opposite way God has told us to go!

The reason some Christians view the culture as the enemy is the culture's increasing opposition to Christianity. But it's important to remind ourselves that the people of God have historically lived in the midst of great opposition and even prejudice.

The nation of Israel has always been targeted by enemies. Jesus was hated, and He told His followers they would also be hated (John 15:18).

So, it should be no surprise to us that we're called to live in the world and share the Gospel of Christ with the world - even though the world will not be "*disposed in a favorable way*" toward us.

In this sense, we are not living in an unusual time in history. We are living today as many believers of past generations have lived - in a culture / world which is opposed to what we believe, and therefore they are often opposed to us.

The question before us today is this:

How do we (Christians) interact with a culture which seems to be increasing their opposition to Christianity?

The Bible's template for how believers should give grace in an unbelieving world.

We live in a world which has always been far from God, but it seems in recent years, our nation's distance from God and rejection of the Christian Church is more blatant and obvious than previous decades. This is evidenced by the following indicators:

- Sexual liberty (heterosexual and homosexual) now trumps religious liberty
- Drinking and drugs - the party and bar scenes
- Rampant pride and living for self - social media obsession which often promotes self
- Political violence and rage - no middle ground
- Religious tolerance vs. religious acceptance - no distinction exists in the culture today - even 'tolerance' has lost its definition
- Decline and dysfunction of marriage - many couples choose living together instead of marriage due to selfishness and/or disenchantment of the institution of marriage.
- Declining view of the Church in American culture (rise of the 'nones')

- Churches often mirror the political and philosophical divides in the culture (liberal vs. conservative) and often adjust the Gospel to justify their ‘posture’ in the culture.

Here’s the challenge - the Bible doesn’t give us a template for living in a non-believing culture.

There’s no “*I-way*” for Christians to live and function in the midst of a culture which is opposed to them.

Consider the varied examples we see in Scripture:

- Joseph served as the VP of Egypt - a pagan nation which worshiped many false gods.
- Elijah spoke boldly against Ahab and Jezebel.
- Obadiah, a devout believer during the time of Elijah’s ministry, worked within Ahab and Jezebel’s administration hiding and protecting 100 prophets from the evil King and Queen. (1 Kings 18:3-4)
- Esther and Daniel both served pagan, idol worshiping empires with excellence.
- Jonah spoke judgment on the evil city of Nineveh.
- Jesus submitted to Pilate’s authority.
- Paul used his Roman citizenship to appeal his case and gain an audience with Caesar.
- We’re told in **Romans 13** and **1 Peter 2** to honor the civic authorities God has installed in office / power.

When the Bible was written, democracy was not a form of government, so there are no direct passages which give clear instruction of how followers of Christ should live in our nation. The Bible's not silent on the topic - there are principles we can learn and apply, but there is no clear, direct instruction about democracies.

Too often we look at other believers, and we get upset if they're not doing the same things we are.

I'm not referring to blatant sin, but to attitudes, preferences and different levels of tolerance regarding the culture one believer may have and another believer doesn't have.

So how do we navigate these waters?

How do we live in a culture so opposed to God...yet so hungry for God's grace?

Since we don't have '1 template' for us to duplicate, here are 2 things which should guide us - 2 things which give us clarity and certainty of direction as to how we should live in a culture so needy for God's grace.

The first thing is:

1) Christians should be publicly known by the Fruit of the Spirit *Galatians 5:22-23*

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."

The first “fruit of the Spirit” Paul mentions is “love”.
Jesus said our love should be the defining ethic of our life. Not morality, not wisdom, not large families or faithful worship - the distinguishing characteristic of His followers must be love! (John 13)

In a culture which lives in constant opposition - where respectful dialogue is a rare occurrence, love stands out - love will be impossible to miss!

When Jesus spoke about this to His disciples, He was talking about their love for each other - the love His followers were to have for one another. Too many have limited Jesus' words so they only love those within the church - those who are like themselves.

But Jesus also said one of the greatest commandments is for us to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31).

Our love should be for those in the church...and outside the Church.

We should also have:

“...joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control...”

Let me ask you this: do you think most people in the culture, when they think about Christians, think about these qualities?

As we live in the quick-changing times we find ourselves in, and the culture around us grows increasingly suspicious and/or opposed to Christianity,

it's important for us to find the clear, direct instruction of God's Word which guides our thoughts and actions for daily life.

The first certainty we have for living in a culture that is increasingly against Christianity - is to publicly display the Fruit of the Spirit. Publicly display (publicly known) is important. This is how we should be with all people, not just other like-minded Christians.

The second certainty is this:

2) Our speech must be full of wisdom and grace *Colossians 4:3-6*

Ohhh...the words we say...the tone of our voice...often lacking wisdom and devoid of grace.

There is certainly overlap here with the Fruit of the Spirit, but the detail Paul gives us is very helpful.

Paul is in prison - talk about those hostile to him and his beliefs!

In **Colossians 4**, he is asking for prayers on his behalf - and he also gives instruction to the believers in Colossae.

“...pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison -- 4 that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

5 Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.

6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”

4 practical actions in these 4 verses which will help us give grace to an unbelieving culture.

Pray for “open doors” to share the Gospel vs. 3

Prayer is essential not only for your personal relationship with God, but for the opportunity to share the Gospel - *Divine Appointments*.

Notice the circumstance Paul is in does not limit his desire to share the Gospel - he's in prison for sharing the Gospel, but he still wants to share the Gospel! His confinement limits how often he can share the Gospel, which is why he is asking for prayer on his behalf.

Do you pray for those in your circle? (Family, friends, neighbors, co-workers) After you pray, are you looking for the open door you've asked God to open - so you can talk about the Gospel in some way?

Work to make the Gospel “clear” to unbelievers vs. 4

“...that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.”

It takes work to make the Gospel clear to an unbeliever.

It's not difficult work, but it takes time to think about it, to think about the words you should use - words which a non-believer would understand - not church language - but common vocabulary.

What questions should you ask?

If you don't ask questions, you don't know what they know - what they don't know - what they think they know - what they're anxious about spiritually, etc. When you ask a question - stop talking...listen to them!

Sharing the Gospel is about having a thoughtful and respectful discussion with someone who doesn't always agree with you.

Sharing the Gospel is not about a memorized script as much as it is about listening and asking questions. Sharing the Gospel can be a conversation where you share about human sin, Jesus' sinless life, sacrificial death, burial and resurrection - but it can also be multiple conversations which take a long time to get down to the spiritual details of the Gospel.

Sharing the Gospel is work - but not burdensome labor. *It's joyful work!*

Even Paul - the experienced missionary - asks for prayer that he will be clear when he speaks to unbelievers.

Be wise - you have limited opportunities vs. 5

Paul makes a shift here in vs. 5, as he now begins to give instruction to his readers. He has 2 primary thoughts in this verse: Wisdom & time management.

“Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.”

Wisdom is a rare commodity in today’s world.

Social Media often has a sophomoric maturity level - where everyone is speaking but nobody is listening - and grace is absent.

Wisdom on Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook is not the norm.

Cable news is not known for its collective wisdom.

Unfortunately, neither are Christians.

We have the wisdom of God’s Word - the wisdom of the Holy Spirit - the wisdom of Christ - but we revert to our human wisdom, which falls short.

If your words are to be believed, your life must display wisdom.

To “walk in wisdom toward outsiders” is not some putting on a ‘fake appearance’, this is a reminder.

Most Christians apply wisdom when they’re at church - when they’re with other Christians.

But many Christians drop their *church wisdom* when they’re in the world. They act more like the world than they should, so Paul reminds us to “walk in wisdom toward outsiders”. Our life must support our testimony.

Then he says, “making the best use of the time.”

Here's the point: you only get so many chances to talk about spiritual things with unbelievers, so when you have an "open door" which God has opened, you need to be ready to walk through the door and have the conversation.

We need to see time in light of their eternal judgment, which should help us sense the urgency of the Gospel in their life.

Time is a wonderful gift of God, but it's a limited gift - we tend to think we have more time than we do - and more opportunities than we will.

At the gym, my tendency is to think *"I'll mention something to them later."* Or *"I'll invite them to church in a few weeks."*

And sometimes, I never see them again, because they started going to another gym - or they moved.

I also have a tendency to wait for them to bring up the topic. But the word Paul uses here has the idea of *redeeming the time - buying the time* - things which are pro-active, intentional and purposeful on my part.

This doesn't mean we should be pushy or to pester people - but we should be intentional and purposeful.

Ephesians 5:15-16

"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,

16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.”

Speak with words that are *gracious* and *effective* vs. 6

How powerful your words can be - for good...or for evil. As followers of Christ in a culture which is so reactionary and increasingly unable to have respectful conversations, we have a great opportunity before us.

6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”

Notice this is something we should do “always”.

At all times our speech must be “gracious” - and “seasoned with salt” - which I have summed up with the word *effective*. (*Salty language sends the wrong message!*)

We saw in vs. 5 your time is limited, which also means your words are limited, so do everything within your power to make sure your words are “gracious” and *effective*. Salt is effective in many ways; it adds flavor, it is a preservative, and it can cause thirst. Words which are “seasoned with salt” are words which are *effective* - they are *effective* by enhancing the flavor of the conversation, your words can go against the decaying nature of some conversations, and your words can cause someone to thirst for more information about Christ.

1 Peter 3:15b

“...always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect...”

Apply it...

Be fruity!

This is exactly what the Houston Team will be doing this week.

Loving others...

Joyful in their work...

Patient...

Kind and good to everyone they meet...

Faithful to their word...

Gentle when talking with someone who has lost everything...

Self-controlled when their work becomes frustrating.

Is your public life a full display of the Fruit of the Spirit?

Live wisely with a calm urgency about the Gospel

The words of your mouth must match the picture your life paints every day.

There is an urgency to sharing the Gospel - time is a vanishing gift - but this should give us purpose, not panic. Trust in God's ability to give the gift of

faith as you are faithful in sharing the Gospel and having spiritual conversations.

Your words need to be gracious and effective on behalf of the Gospel.

We must live in the culture, but not be ‘of’ the culture.

Make sure you can relate to people in the culture, so you can know them - know what they enjoy and struggle with - and eventually you’ll be more informed as to how to share the Gospel with them.

Close in prayer