

Our Cultural Mandate - Part IV¹

In previous months I addressed the Biblical basis of our cultural mandate by using Old Testament commands and the example of godly men in influential public positions. The New Testament is another rich environment to draw from. When Christ was on earth, Israel was a religious nation, but under the authoritarian Roman Empire. In some ways, that era is closer to our situation than Old Testament times. Although faith still has a big impact on our nation, our government is secular and day by day becoming more hostile to Christian influence. Be that as it may, Jesus' teaching sheds interesting light on our role in this generation, whether citizens of the United States, or any nation. For now, let's just look through the Gospel of Matthew through the lens of our duty to "love our neighbor as ourselves" (Matt 22:39), and to be "salt and light" (Matt 5:13-16) to the society and nation around us.

Jesus taught that a house divided cannot stand (Matt 12:25-30). As with the family of God, the same holds true of any nation, great or small. The more we stray as a people from the Biblical truths that provide the underpinnings for our nation, the closer the time comes that we'll cease being a blessing to the world. Without reliance on God's truths as the foundation for judging right and wrong and energizing our duty towards each other, we as a people will drift toward anything that serves our own selfish interests and emotions. This was what drove the people in Jerusalem to scream for the crucifixion of Christ when Pilot "counted the votes" and gave in to the mob instead of judging rightly (Matt 27:21-26). Ultimately, moral relativism can destroy the Biblical foundation that undergirds our freedoms, our families, our culture and our nation. A similar teaching is found in Matt 7:24-27 where the wise man builds his house on rock and not sand. God's word is our bedrock, it doesn't change (Matt 5:18), and He knows what's best for us all, Christian or not. Why would we not want to apply it everywhere we can?

For those of us who've lived a little longer, reading Matt 16:1-3 about interpreting the signs of the times is instructive. Living through the last generation has given us an opportunity to witness the transforming of our country from a relatively Christianized environment, to a Post-Christian era into an Anti-Christian era - one where Christ is legally, and forcibly, removed from the public domain as much as possible. Granted, some wonderful victories are being won in the courts to restore a few of our religious freedoms, but anyone with eyes to see has noticed that evil has powerfully come out of the closet to challenge everything that we hold as pure and wholesome. Miraculously, we still have an amazing amount of influence on the affairs of our society, however, it can come to nothing if we continue to remove ourselves from the fight and acquiesce to evil. The challenge for us is to be creative, and take the eternal Word entrusted to our care and apply it in new, insightful, and relevant ways for the common good – in effect putting

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new wine in new wine skins (Matt 9:16-17). Remember, God's word is eternal and perfect, yet it's fresh and new to each generation, with answers for every challenge that generation faces.

Finally, Jesus was not timid (Matt 15:16-20) to call sin for what it is – sin! He also identified the source of sin – the heart. It's one thing for us to correctly point out "...evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" and the like as evil, but it's quite another to convince someone that pure thoughts, protecting life, sexual purity and fidelity, generosity, and telling the truth will be blessed by the Lord and is in a one's own best self interest. If we give up on presenting the abundant evidence demonstrating the benefits of God's principles, and the incredible destruction that inevitably follows from evil thoughts and actions, then we have little relevancy to a decaying world, dying in its own filth. If we have no heart to work diligently and sincerely for someone else's (and society's) benefit and good, why would we be looked to as a credible source when we share the gospel of eternal life (Matt 28:18-20)?

Our cultural mandate in the Gospel of Matthew is clear if we have eyes to see. Next month I'll present more examples from this wonderful book. If you would like the prior articles in this series, you can request them at the e-mail below or find them at www.goodnewsetc.com.

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