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Christianity in a Culture in Crisis

America's culture in 2023 is in many ways unrecognizable compared to the culture of previous generations. As a Christian, some things should bother you. God loves justice (Psalm 37:28) and righteousness (Psalm 146:8), so the godly should, too. The prevalence of unrighteousness and injustice in our country is appalling. In Zephaniah's day, God warned His people against being too comfortable, or "stagnant in spirit," (Zephaniah 1:12), and rather to "seek righteousness, seek humility," (Zephaniah 2:3). But what does that look like for a Christian today? Jeremiah, a contemporary of Zephaniah, gives further instruction to the Jews shortly after they are taken captive by Babylon.

"Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and father sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may give birth to sons and daughters; and grow in numbers there and do not decrease. Seek the prosperity of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord in its behalf; for in its prosperity will be your prosperity." (Jeremiah 29:5-7).

The Lord's instruction to His people who were forced to live in a morally corrupt culture was not to protest and riot and burn the place down, but to carry out their lives as normally as possible. As we would say it today, God's people need to be "in the world, but not of the world." Let's consider a few other principles of Scripture that will help us live righteously in an unrighteous culture.

Love your neighbor. Romans 13:10 says "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the Law." It makes no difference who your neighbor is, Christians need to treat every human being with kindness and respect. Let's not get so caught up in left and right that we forget there is an up and a down. When the Good Samaritan helped his neighbor in Luke 10, he asked no questions about the man's identity, his voting record, what kind of flag he flew in his yard, or where he attended worship services. You can (and must) love your neighbor without always agreeing with them, (Luke 6:27-36).

Aspire to lead a quiet life. 1 Thessalonians 4:11 says "make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we instructed you." There are probably a lot of things you would like to change that are beyond your control. Life presents you with an infinite amount of ways to waste time and become a busybody. Distractions call for your attention at every turn. Never forget that you are heaven-bound, and put your focus and energy on spiritual matters that align with that goal.

Speak up for what is right. Proverbs 31:8-9 says "Open your mouth for the people who cannot speak, for the rights of all the unfortunate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the poor and needy." In your effort to lead a quiet life, there are times you must speak up. 2 Timothy 2:25 shows us the need to correct

"those who are in opposition." Ephesians 5:11 says "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them." We do not need to give our opinion on every issue, as our "ambition," after all, is "to lead a quiet life." However, when the opportunity presents itself, do not hide your light under a basket, but rather let it shine for people to see so that God may be glorified, (Matthew 5:14-16).

This culture, just like the rest of the world, is temporary. In Zephaniah 3, God promises to save the remnant of His people who remain faithful to Him. The dominant culture of the day will always try to influence you to conform. As a faithful child of God, your aim is to be transformed, not conformed, (Romans 12:2). The promise of eternal salvation remains for all those who remain faithful to God despite the influence of the world around them.

- Dustin Russell

The Apostles Were Not Roman Catholics

From the following facts it can be clearly seen that the apostles were not members of the Roman Catholic Church, and that the Catholic Church does not teach the same doctrine taught by Christ and the apostles.

1. The apostles taught an entirely different doctrine from that which is taught by the Roman Catholic Church.
2. All the apostles died long before the Catholic Church came into existence. The last apostle died about 95 A.D. This was at least 500 years before the Roman Catholic Church was established.
3. The Apostle Peter was a married man (Luke 4:38) and was never a pope nor is he referred to in the Bible as the head of the church. No apostle ever taught the doctrine of celibacy (1 Timothy 3:2; 4:1-3; 1 Corinthians 9:5).
4. No apostle of Christ, nor any other writer of the New Testament, ever mentioned the Catholic mass, auricular confession, praying to or in the name of the virgin Mary, nor any other doctrine peculiar to the Roman Catholic Hierarchy. The Apostle Paul said, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;" (1 Timothy 2:5).
5. Matthew recorded the command of Christ to "call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven." (Matthew 23:9).
6. The teaching of the apostles came from heaven and is not subject to any change, whereas, the teaching of the Catholic Church is from men and is constantly changing. The Apostle Paul said, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1:8). He further emphasized this statement in the very next verse wherein he declared, "As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."
7. The apostles taught and emphasized the fact that the only source of Divine Authority is the Bible. The Apostle John set forth the all-sufficiency of the written word when he said, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." (John 20:30-31).

8. Traditions of men that alter God's word in any way are specifically condemned by the Lord (Matthew 15:6; Mark 7:1-13). Moreover, the Bible contains everything that is necessary to know in order to be saved from past sins, to live the Christian life and be saved eternally. (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 Corinthians 4:6; Revelation 22:18-19).

9. The only authentic record of what Christ and the apostles taught is found in the Bible, and nowhere in this Book is any mention made of the Catholic Church, The Roman Catholic Church, The Roman Catholic Hierarchy, or any of the officials of this organization, such as the Pope, Cardinals, and Archbishops.

10. Christ had no successors, neither did the apostles. The only way to hear the voice of God is through the Bible (Matthew 28:18-20; 2 John 9-11).

- Ivan R. Stewart, via The Instructor, October, 1972 [slightly edited – GFS]

The Foundation!

In 1 Corinthians 3:10, Paul says, "According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it."

The Lord Jesus Christ had commissioned Paul to "be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard." (Acts 22:15). Christ sent him to preach "the word of the cross" (1 Corinthians 1:18), "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24), in order to persuade people to "turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in" Christ (Acts 26:18). In fulfilling this commission Paul would be establishing a "foundation" in places where people had not heard of Jesus, the Christ (Romans 15:20-21). The foundation upon which Paul was building is Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11).

By the grace of God Paul was called to be a wise master builder of the Lord's church upon the rock-solid, secure foundation of the divine Son of God (cf. Peter's confession and what the Lord promised to build upon it, Matthew 16:16-18). This is the **ONLY** foundation upon which mankind serves the true and living God!

As Paul continued his preaching tours, others continued to evangelize in places where the church was established (for example, Apollos, in 1 Corinthians 3:6). Others continued teaching the gospel, making new converts and helping believers advance in knowledge to maturity. Notice that Paul warned the other builders to be careful how they built. No person is regarded as a faithful and successful builder upon the foundation of Christ by preaching a different gospel (Galatians 1:6-9). The resulting church is only genuine as it abides in the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9-11). This vital warning applies even today, because "many false prophets" and "many deceivers have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1; 2 John 7). Sadly, this truth is overlooked by many.

Flip the pages of history ahead two-thousand years. What the Holy Spirit revealed in the age of the apostles has surely come to pass: "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines

of demons," (1 Timothy 4:1). Man's creative imagination has produced a wide assortment of false religions, false doctrines, false disciples, false teachers and false plans for man's salvation. They are too numerous to list. However, when the Lord God of heaven establishes His purpose, no amount of human effort can prevent it.

Notice: "Therefore thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed.'" (Isaiah 28:16; cf. 1 Peter 2:3-8). This stone was tested and proven genuine; this is the foundation of real value. Christ is the firmly placed, immovable and permanent foundation in the Lord God's spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5), "choice and precious in the sight of God," (1 Peter 2:4). There are many living stones in the building, but there is only one foundation. Concerning Jesus, Peter said it well: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

The church that belongs to Christ (Acts 20:28) that He promised to build (Matthew 16:18) and became a reality a few days following His ascension (Acts 2:47) believed and confessed this fundamental truth. The church can be built only upon this foundation, which results from preaching the gospel of Christ, "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes," (Romans 1:16).

May the Lord bless every believer and the work of building which is undertaken for His glory! In the beginning of His earthly ministry, "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'" (Mark 1:14-15). This is the gospel that Paul preached and urged others to preach, taking great care with the entrusted message. Have you received this gospel and become a living stone in the Lord's house?

- Gary Smalley

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- * "He who cooks up trouble usually lands in a stew of his own making!"
 - * "The way to keep a body from being a busybody is to keep the body busy!"
 - * "When we attempt great things for God we can expect great things from God!"
 - * "Faith sees the invisible, believes the incredible, and receives what seems impossible!"
 - * "God created heaven and earth — and you! We best not forget it"
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What Must I Do To Be Saved?

HEAR THE GOSPEL

(Romans 10:14-17; John 20:30-31; Romans 1:15-17)

BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

(Acts 8:37; John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6)

REPENT OF PAST SINS

(Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30)

CONFESS CHRIST

(Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37)

BE BAPTIZED

(Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-39; 1 Peter 3:21)

LIVE A FAITHFUL LIFE

(Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:5-11; John 15:1-8; Hebrews 10:23-25)